

LLANELLY AND COUNTY

LLANELLY SENSATION.

RICHAELIEU SHOTS HIMSELF.

REMOVED TO THE HOSPITAL.

LITTLE HOPES ENTERTAINED
OF RECOVERY.

The startling announcement that Mr. Richaelieu had attempted to take his life in the early hours of Wednesday morning, did not cause any surprise to those who were intimately acquainted with him. For some time past he had been strange in his behaviour and was evidently mentally affected. The circumstances under which he gave up business are well known, but it may be of interest to our readers to briefly relate the facts.

COAL

"Revenge," as — "is a sort of w he knew very li often injustice thought Mr. Jo attempt to show

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THE EXTRAORDINARY MR RIECHAELEIU

by Barry Watts

Irdan Miguel Riechaelieu.

It was an unusual name, exotic even,
a name people might remember - and they did.

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INTRODUCTION	3
Irdan Miguel Riechaelieu	3
CHAPTER ONE	7
Arrival in Llanelly and the First Disputes in Court	7
CHAPTER TWO	10
The Great Watch Case	10
CHAPTER THREE.....	15
Three Cases in Three Months	15
CHAPTER FOUR.....	18
The Leather Medal and The Kitson Lights	18
CHAPTER FIVE	21
Bankruptcy and Soloman Chinn	21
CHAPTER SIX	28
Truth and Lies	28
CHAPTER SEVEN.....	33
Marriage Breakdown and the Stepney Street Fire	33
CHAPTER EIGHT	37
Abuse, False Claims, Illness and Perjury	37
CHAPTER NINE	41
Riechaelieu Attempts Suicide	41
CHAPTER TEN.....	46
Larceny, Divorce, Assault and Another Divorce	46
CHAPTER ELEVEN.....	52
His Final Days	52
POSTSCRIPT	55

INTRODUCTION

Irdan Miguel Riechaelieu. It was an unusual name, exotic even, a name people might remember - and they did.

Riechaelieu arrived in Llanelly in 1899 - by the time he left in 1913 his name was synonymous with conflict, notorious for violence and dishonesty among Llanelly jewellers and watchmakers, and in all the local police courts.

He was a slight, mild-looking man. Although devious and untrustworthy, he was a wealthy, driven and energetic businessman and, as his achievements demonstrate, he could be a persuasive man possessed of considerable charm.

The Riechaelieu family appear in the 1901 Census as resident at 43 Stepney Street, a fashionable jewellery shop with residential accommodation above¹. In 2019, the premises are occupied by a Charity Shop.



*Mr Riechaelieu displaying livestock.
Weekly Mail 11 August 1906.*

Llanelly in the early 1900s was not as it is today, a post-industrial town with many charity shops and fast food outlets, its best buildings converted into pubs, its chapels neglected. In Riechaelieu's time it was rich, confident and forward looking with fine buildings, prosperous businesses, a brand new town hall and the prospect of Borough status. The town was fully paved and drained, had a reliable water supply, and lighting in the streets provided by its own gasworks. Its industries were thriving and its markets and shops catered to a growing population drawn from all parts of the British Isles attracted by the town's success. Riechaelieu acquired the business at 43 Stepney Street and began trading as D.IMR & Co. He was a jeweller, watchmaker, pawnbroker, diamond merchant, gold dealer, money lender and livestock breeder. In his imagined world, he was also an heroic, daring, gentleman adventurer spying on behalf of the British Secret Service.

He married three times. The first is a mystery, suggested only by the "widower" status given on his second marriage certificate. Riechaelieu had four children with his second wife, Louise Smith Perren, three of whom died in infancy and only Gladys, the fourth child, survived. He had two more children in a third marriage. These too, died in infancy.

¹ The Riechaelieu family lived here until 1906, but at various times was also resident in Coldstream Street, Great Western Terrace, Old Castle Road

Riechaelieu was the Director of D.IMR & Co, (his IMR initials, plus his father, Don's initial), which had run jewellery shops in Norwich and Hull, and from 1899, in Stepney Street, Llanelly. For nearly fifteen years he sold his watches, and gold and silver goods in a manner certain to upset established Llanelly traders, disparaging the competition, under-cutting prices, all with shameless self-promotion. He exhibited his livestock, proclaiming himself 'The Cavey ² King'. He kept guinea pigs and pigeons, and also dogs, lizards, snakes and fish. One newspaper reported his claim "*I made my money by scientific breeding of covies. I have been probably the most successful live stock man the world has ever seen*". ³

In the 1890s Riechaelieu's many legal skirmishes which had included at least one custodial sentence in his hometown of Norwich ⁴, set the tone for his arrival in Llanelly where his astonishing number of legal wrangles, and outrageous behaviour were soon to be widely followed in the press. So frequent were the newspaper reports, that some headlines simply proclaimed "*Riechaelieu Again!*" ⁵. It was in Llanelly, after a decade and a half of mayhem, the collapse of his business and of his marriage to Louise, that Riechaelieu met and married the author's luckless grandmother, Jesse Watkeys, niece of the influential George Watkeys, Llanelly's Borough Surveyor for over fifty years. ⁶ Their short and ill-fated relationship, characterised by Riechaelieu's brutality, culminated in his premature death.



Llanelly Town Hall ILL7505

² The cavy is a rodent of the *Caviidae* family native to South America and is also known as the guinea pig. Despite their common name, guinea pigs are not native to Guinea, nor are they biologically related to pigs.

³ Cardiff Times 11 May 1907 "Llanelly Tradesman"

⁴ City of Norwich Return of Persons Committed or Bailed to appear for trial... 22 November 1888

⁵ Evening Express 25 July 1907; Weekly Mail 27 July 1907; Llanelly Mercury & South

⁶ South Wales Press 23 December 1931 Obituary "Death of Corporation's Grand Old Man"

Riechaelieu thrived on confrontation, aggression and confusion, exacerbated by his adoption of various *alter egos*. He claimed to be the Spanish son of the British Consul in Seville, Spain. On another occasion he claimed to be the Consul himself appointed by the British government. He claimed descent from Cardinal Richelieu ⁷ and often claimed he had worked for the Secret Service in South Africa, fighting under the Union flag, and passing military information on Boer activity to the British Government, in effect, as a spy. Such a glamorous and exotic history was bound to intrigue, but throughout his life, much of what this relentless self-publicist said, was simply untrue.

From 1899 until 1915 the Llanelly press reported his behaviour with increasing fascination. The stories painted a complex picture of an habitual and shameless liar, drug addict, cheat, bully and swindler, with a frighteningly vicious and vengeful temper. The litany of his misdemeanours includes extreme domestic abuse, threats with razors and a revolver, once firing shots at his wife Louise, attacks with whips and ropes, punching out teeth, pushing people downstairs, and setting dogs on them, multiple suicide attempts, fraudulent business deals, cheats, swindles and deception. He was caught *in flagrante* with a married woman, inevitably assaulted by the husband, and then named as co-respondent in their divorce, followed rapidly by his own divorce from Louise. He also committed larceny, perjury, arson, insurance fraud, adultery, breaking and entering, assuming a false identity, receiving stolen goods, criminal damage and even threatening prosecution counsel in open court. He served at least two custodial sentences. In a third marriage, there were false accusations, causing false imprisonment, threatening behaviour, and a second acrimonious divorce.

He had appeared in court at least seven times in Hull and Norwich before his arrival in Llanelly. The charges included swindling other dealers, larceny and a brutal attack on his wife, for which the headlines read "*Alleged shocking case of brutality... thrashing... with fist and whip*" ⁸. He took rooms for a young woman, Kate Hillerby, buying her fashionable clothes, which prompted the Hull Vigilance Association ⁹ ("*protectors of young girls and fallen women*"), to publicly brand him a scoundrel. ¹⁰ This behaviour was repeated in Llanelly a decade later, when he kept a house at 62



*Riechaelieu's shop
site in Stepney Street
2020, photo by Lyn
John*

⁷ Cardinal Richelieu, Armand Jean du Plessis, Duke of Richelieu, (1585-1642) French cleric and statesman

⁸ Hull Daily Mail 1-2 July 1891 "Alleged shocking case of brutality in Hull"

⁹ Location: Jarratt Street, Hull Baines Gazetteer 1823

¹⁰ Hull Daily Mail 2 July 1891 "The Alleged Brutal Conduct of a Husband"

High Street, for his mistress, Lizzie Dinah Williams.

In Llanelli he appeared in court over thirty times during his fourteen years residence. The cases were mostly clustered between 1900-1 and 1906-7 and were mainly brought against fellow traders, or vice versa. He also took legal action with apparently purely mischievous intent, seemingly to satisfy his own need for attention. At times he took full page, bilingual newspaper ads, setting out his disagreement with the court's decision, explaining why he thought the law was wrong. He chose to become a bankrupt in order to avoid his financial obligations. This was followed by a period in the workhouse, then time in an asylum, then another custodial sentence and still more suicide attempts.

Finally, while married to the author's grandmother Jesse, and although he had left the town some years earlier, his lonely death was widely reported in the Llanelli press.

The following chapters give a faithful account, well documented in local newspapers, of his erratic incident-filled career and his tragic but inevitable end.

Acknowledgements

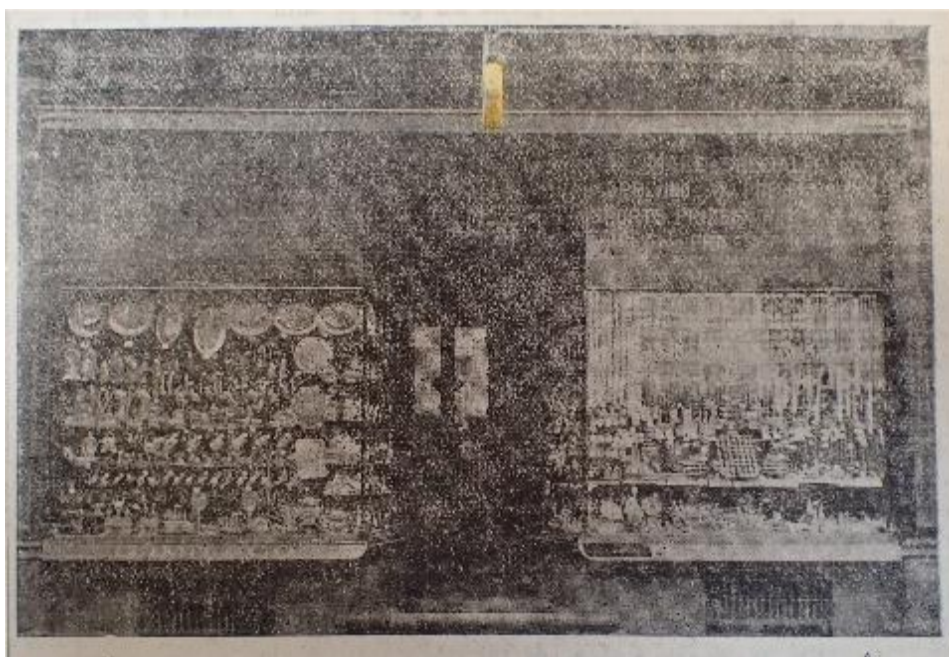
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CHAPTER ONE

Arrival in Llanelly and the First Disputes in Court

From the moment he arrived in Llanelly in March 1899, Riechaelieu's relationship with fellow traders, particularly jewellers and watchmakers, was fraught. He bought the jewellers shop at 43 Stepney Street, once managed by Charles Lane, as a going concern, from the owner Mr Hancocks, for £1,123 (£138,000 today). Hancocks had obtained the business from a Mr Gauz, and had installed his brother-in-law, Lane, as manager ¹.



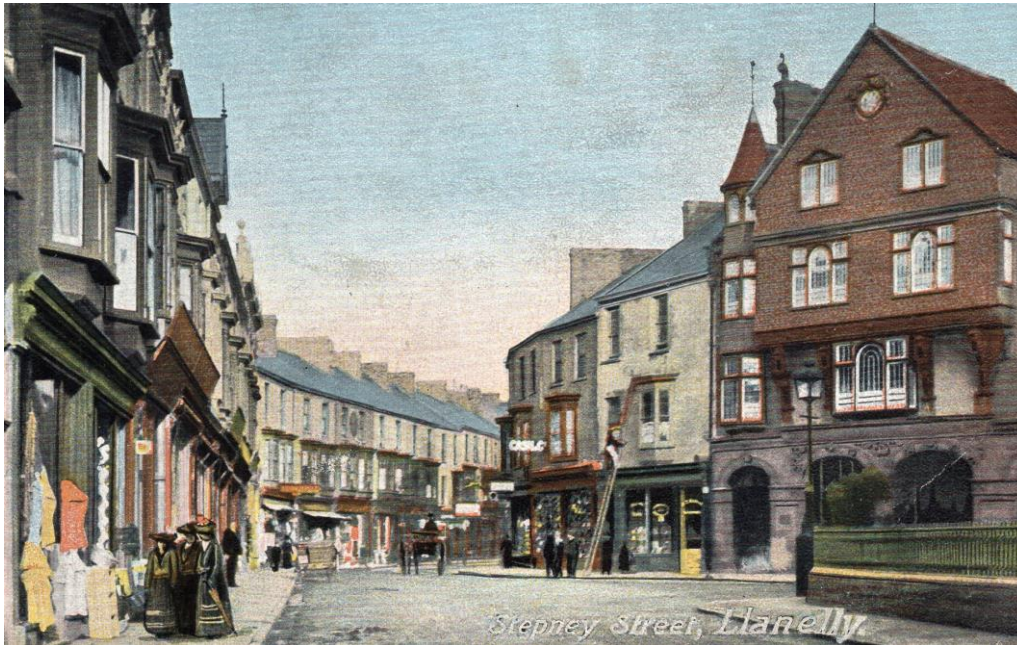
*D.IMR & Co 43 Stepney St. Circa 1900. Llanelly Guardian 1st September 1904
Note the Golden Ring above the entrance.*

It was as a cash deal for the business, the stock and the goodwill. The shop was impressive, with a central door and a large double-frontage, its windows filled with gold and silverware. Newspaper ads proclaimed high quality goods bearing his exclusive "D.IMR & Co" stamp. A huge gold ring was suspended over the shop doorway, visible the length of Stepney Street.

Riechaelieu made a down payment of £1,000 but was soon unhappy, and with good reason. Much of the silver and gold stock listed as part of the deal turned out to be plate, gold rings turned out to be display dummies, and the remaining stock was largely inferior to the sale notes. Some stock was not stock at all, but goods in for repair, including the Llanelly Parish Hall clock, which Riechaelieu believed he had bought for 4 guineas (£480 today). Riechaelieu refused to pay the purchase balance

¹ Evening Express, 25 November 1899 "A Llanelly Dispute"

of £123 (£15,000). Hancocks sued Riechaelieu, who promptly launched a counter claim for misrepresentation and breach of agreement².



Stepney St. c.1900

The dispute reached the Courts in November 1899 where the extent of Hancocks' mis-selling became apparent, and where Riechaelieu's assertions were proved largely true. The deal had also required that Mr Cornelius Griffin, a watchmaker employed by Hancocks, be retained by Riechaelieu and, to indicate his sincerity, Hancocks offered a contract guaranteeing that neither he, his half-brother Lane, nor any of their workmen, would set up a competitive business within a 12 mile radius.

Riechaelieu won his case, was allowed the £123 balance, and was also awarded £70 costs. The contract preventing local competition was widely reported and would not have gone down well with fellow traders. Griffin had been quickly sacked by Riechaelieu, and no doubt considering this an act of bad faith, newspapers reported that he became highly unpleasant and wasted no time setting up a business just five doors away from Riechaelieu's shop³. Cornelius Griffin reappeared six months later as a witness giving evidence against Riechaelieu in what became known as The Great Watch Case. It was to be the start of a long battle between Riechaelieu and the jewellers and watchmakers of Llanelli, and the continuation of his previous decade of legal battles in Norwich and Hull.

Before the Hancocks case had even reached the court Riechaelieu was embroiled in a second litigation when in August 1899 Messrs Broatman & Barnch, shopfitters, had launched proceedings against him to recover £53 10s (£6,500) for the cost of fitting out the Stepney Street shop⁴. He had

² South Wales Daily Post, 28 November 1899 "A Llanelli Dispute"

³ Evening Express 25 November 1899

⁴ South West Daily Post, 12 August 1899 "Claim against a Llanelli Jeweller"

ordered large mirrors, curtains, display cases, and drawers for his safe. It is hard to imagine such work being done on a handshake, without written quotations, but Riechaelieu's defence was simply that he had paid the agreed price (£25), and without documentation, who could argue? Judgement was for Riechaelieu, who also received costs.

Here was a man who in a matter of months had called two cases to the courts, had won both, and walked away with significant damages. Simultaneously, he embarked on a promotional programme bound to further antagonise his fellow traders, by placing adverts in the local press proclaiming "*We hate imposition, we court opposition, we defy competition*"⁵. He was clearly prepared to rubbish his fellow traders, and that troubled relationship quickly escalated into what became known as "The Great Watch Case".

⁵ Llanelly Mercury, 13 April 1899 "We hate imposition, we court opposition, we defy competition.

CHAPTER TWO

The Great Watch Case

In July 1900 the watchmakers Messrs Mayer Blankensee, brought an important Interpleader¹ action against Riechaelieu and his wife, Louise². The case was clearly intended to address a tactic often used by Riechaelieu, that of denying ownership of D.IMR & Co when it suited him³. He had used this argument in the past but this time both Riechaelieu and Louise were compelled to litigate jointly to clarify once and for all who owned the company.



The court set down that Louise was the legal owner of D.IMR & Co, a decision which became hugely significant and would have profound implications just a few years later. But for now, although Louise was the owner, given her husband's controlling manner and violence, she was probably forced to defer to him, and in effect D.IMR & Co would be run by Riechaelieu in everything but name. He still believed the company belonged to him and when it was destroyed by a mysterious fire a few years later it was he who claimed the salvage stock and applied for insurance compensation. He had no compunction about cheating and lying in the knowledge that his wife might be held

responsible for his actions. This pattern occurred again in 1913 when Jesse, his third wife, was arrested for possession of stolen goods⁴ when Riechaelieu had successfully argued that he was not the thief, leaving his wife of just four weeks to face the court and a criminal conviction.

The Interpleader case was quickly followed on 18th March 1901 by further action from Messrs Mayer Blankensee, now certain whom to pursue⁵. The case was brought to recover payment for several gold chains, delivered but not paid for - another regular Riechaelieu tactic. The court recognised Louise Riechaelieu's ownership of D.IMR & Co, and while she may not have even been aware of the deal, she was helpless to defend the action. The courts found against her and instructed D.IMR & Co to repay the debt by monthly payments of £4 (about £500 today).

In January 1901, the year of Queen Victoria's death, Riechaelieu's relationship with fellow Llanelly traders reached a new low with the arrival of the Great Watch Case. In just over a year, he had established a reputation as a serial litigant and now faced more charges, this time for cheating and deceiving another dealer by charging a top price, while passing off inferior goods.

¹ An Interpleader is a civil procedure typically used when a plaintiff is unclear whom to challenge to recover a debt. Where several parties claim or deny ownership of the same assets, they must all appear, to resolve the dispute in a single action, rather than the plaintiff litigating several parties.

² Evening Express, 24 July 1900 "Llanelly, An Ex-Secret Service Agent"

³ The South Wales Press, 17 January 1901 "The Tale of a Watch"

⁴ "Secret Sins - Sex, Violence and Society in Carmarthenshire, 1870-1920" p.124 Russell Davies, University of Wales Press, 1996 ISBN 0-7083-1367-1

⁵ Llanelly & County Guardian, 21 March 1901

The Great Watch Case caught the town's imagination in an extraordinary way. For Riechaelieu it was expensive, acrimonious and hugely damaging⁶. The case focused on his sale of a watch to Mr William John, of Burry Port. The watch was sold as a product of the very highest calibre, 18ct solid gold, a classic English timepiece with a breathtaking price tag of £18.15s. (£2,000 today). Mr John bought the watch and quickly found a buyer, but when he sought provenance, Riechaelieu simply refused to put anything in writing. Without the appropriate documents, John could not sell the watch which he quickly realised was not what it appeared, and that he had been royally duped by a fellow dealer. John had little choice but to launch legal action. As he said later in court, if it became known that he had knowingly sold a Swiss watch as an English timepiece, his reputation would be ruined.

Riechaelieu's options were either to admit having swindled a fellow jeweller and offer repayment, or to engage in the court battle to discredit John. It is no surprise that Riechaelieu chose the second option. The fight was on, and the town was watching when proceedings began in January 1901.



D.IMR & Co. photo courtesy Stuart Howells

Around the same time as the Great Watch Case, Riechaelieu launched a legal attack on the young Ivor Davies, his apprentice. At first glance, it seemed an irrelevance to claim £2 9s damages (£300 today), from the young man for breach of his Apprenticeship Deed⁷. It seems unnecessarily harsh. Riechaelieu won the case, which was insignificant in financial terms, but there was another reason for bringing the case to court. Young Ivor Davies was the nephew of William John, plaintiff in the Great Watch Case. Riechaelieu's ill-conceived acts of revenge were to become increasingly frequent. In some cases his revenge held devastating consequences for the victims, destroying business and livelihood.

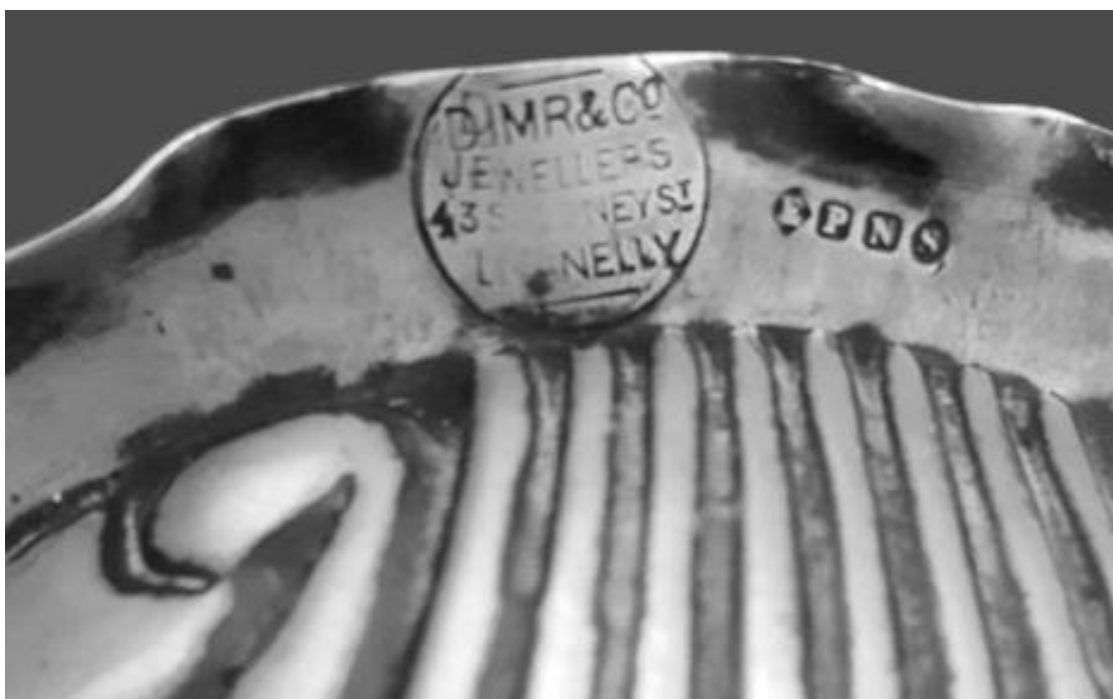
Riechaelieu had gained a reputation for trouble, and in a close community like Llanelli swindling fellow traders would quickly become gossip. Local traders didn't like him, which became abundantly clear as the Great Watch Case progressed and many local jewellers gave evidence against him. Mr Griffin, a Llanelli jeweller once employed by D.IMR & Co and acrimoniously sacked by Riechaelieu six months earlier, gave testimony that the watch Riechaelieu had sold was

⁶ Evening Express, 16 January 1901; Llanelli Mercury 17 January 1901; Llanelli & County Guardian, 17 January 1901

⁷ South Wales Press 3 January 1901 "A Jeweller's Apprentice"

not 18ct gold, but in fact some of it was gold plated brass⁸. Robert Wherle, a jeweller in Station Road, in a withering statement, claimed not a single screw or pin was English; there was no English hallmark or any way to verify the quality of the gold, and the wholesale price would be about £4.10s. Henry Kaltenbach, watchmaker and jeweller who in 1897 had premises in Vaughan Street and in the New Arcade Buildings, said the watch could not be English because it bore no hallmark. But Kaltenbach's criticism was measured, perhaps because he and Riechaelieu already had business connections. Nevertheless, within six months, Kaltenbach would face Riechaelieu in fractious courtroom fights on three further occasions.

Riechaelieu's defence in the Great Watch Case followed his oft-used strategy: present contradictory evidence, then insist you are telling the truth. Riechaelieu claimed the watch being examined was not the one he had sold to John at all. He had never seen it before, and what's more, it did not bear his company stamp.



D.IMR & Co company stamp. Courtesy Amanda Hughes.

Riechaelieu claimed, rightly, that he didn't own D.IMR & Co - it belonged to Louise. But this now proved irrelevant as William John had done a deal with Riechaelieu - not with D.IMR & Co. Having refused to provide anything in writing, Riechaelieu could not then claim this was a company deal. Then to add confusion, Riechaelieu tried to divert the argument, suggesting John had sought goods on credit, so that he could open a shop in Burry Port.

During cross examination, and not for the first or last time, the prosecution raised doubts about Riechaelieu's honesty and his shady past. He was asked about an alias. Was he really Irdan Miguel Riechaelieu from Spain, or was he really John William Townsend from Norwich? And who was

⁸Griffin had been named in the twelve-mile exclusion zone Riechaelieu tried to secure. See Hancocks case, above.

this Dan Towan who carried out financial transactions in his name? The prosecution also linked him to a man named Brazell. Riechaelieu was asked if he knew Brazell, who had apparently imported gold dust from South Africa. He said he did, but then tried to close down the dialogue, claiming it was a matter between the Treasury and the South African Government. The questioning continued on whether the mysterious Brazell had imported fake gold. Riechaelieu confirmed this was true, because the gold dust had turned out to be brass. There is no further trace of the mysterious fraudster Brazell, but numerous *alter egos* and the South African link would recur throughout Riechaelieu's story.

The court did not accept Riechaelieu's smokescreen of confusion. The Great Watch Case jury's decision rested on his inability to provide a satisfactory sales record to evidence his claims. The jury found in favour of William John. The Judge directed John to return the watch to Riechaelieu, who was directed to repay the price in full. Incensed, Riechaelieu quickly sought a retrial, which was just as quickly refused. It was a humiliating defeat and his reputation, already battered, now lay in tatters. The extent of his anger became apparent from what he did next.

With astonishing effrontery and contempt for legal process, Riechaelieu launched an expensive newspaper campaign to exonerate himself, explaining to the people of Llanelly why the judge and the jury were wrong. On 24 January 1901 he took an 800-word, two-column full page advertisement, in English and also in Welsh, in the broadsheet Llanelly Mercury. It carried the headline,

Great Watch Case

IS NOT YET DONE WITH.

Judge and Jury Grossly Deceived.

STARTLING REVELATIONS TO BE MADE.

*"The Great Watch Case is not done with yet. Judge and jury grossly deceived. Startling revelations to be made and as gold is purified by fire so will the reputation of D.IMR & Co be more firmly established"*⁹.

Then with words certain to antagonise local traders still further, he continued:

"What is the reason for the animosity shown by trade opponents to D.IMR & Co? Because we undersell them and have time after time exposed the big profits made by them...."

Riechaelieu went on to reveal his competitors' profit margins - something they would have wanted to remain

confidential. He challenged his competitors to demonstrate that they had superior stock; he declared himself to be one of the most expert watchmakers in the country and while his competitors hired people for repairs and servicing, he claimed to know every branch of his trade, from making a ring to cleaning a watch and that *"...no other man in Llanelly can say this"*. It was a self-promotional rant, with only a passing reference to the Great Watch Case.

⁹Llanelly Mercury, 24 and 31 January 1901 and 7 February 1901, "The Great Watch Case"

The text continued, attacking a local, unnamed, jeweller who had in his window a claim to be '*Clockmaker to Her Majesty's Government*'. In a somewhat hypocritical statement Riechaelieu declared "*..there ought to be a law preventing people using words and sentences in connection with their business that are not absolutely true*". Then in a reference to his first Llanelly case, against Hancocks where he recovered costs against the purchase of his shop, he continued,

"We know we have enemies to deal with, for when Mr Riechaelieu exposed the great misrepresentation and the Jury at Cardiff Assizes awarded him £200 and costs in connection with the business sold to him, the friends and relations of the seller were naturally not pleased. So let the public judge between us and deal direct with D.IMR & Co".

To add further insult, Riechaelieu again published the advertisements, which were arguably in contempt of court, on 31 January, and for a third time on 7 February 1901.

But Riechaelieu still wasn't done. On 28 March he wrote a long letter to the local press¹⁰ responding to recent commentary by a local solicitor, regarding his more outrageous claims, and specifically his military role in the Transvaal. The solicitor in question was almost certainly Mr T R Lodford, prosecutor in the Great Watch Case, who had recently delivered Riechaelieu a sound legal drubbing. The newspaper wrote a short piece explaining "*..a long letter from Mr Riechaelieu*", announcing with regret that they could not find space to publish the whole of it. They did however print a sizeable chunk, in which Riechaelieu took issue with the solicitor for not recognising his bravery and valour, and for calling him a spy. Riechaelieu favoured a more jingoistic description, insisting "*...the Riechaelieu family had given of their blood, their treasure, their life, in defence of the flag of England...*". He went on to describe the politics in Johannesburg, and indeed appeared quite knowledgeable. One is tempted to believe him, but that of course, was one of his skills. Riechaelieu had been exposed as a cheat and a liar and if he had not already been a total pariah to the local traders, he certainly was now. Far from bridge-building, he was turning acrimonious relations with his business competitors, into open hostility.

¹⁰Llanelly & County Guardian 28 March 1901 "Letter from Mr. Riechaelieu"

CHAPTER THREE

Three Cases in Three Months

1) Riechaelieu *versus* Kaltenbach

Soon after the damaging Great Watch Case in 1901, Riechaelieu launched his three-month campaign of self promotion, placing ads in newspapers, proclaiming his innocence and publicly dismantling the court's conclusions and rubbishing the prosecution counsel. His contempt for the legal process and refusal to be held to account must have been hugely annoying to other local tradesmen. There followed seven court actions in the next twelve months, with three between March and May 1901 alone, where he faced adversaries on multiple tit-for-tat cases.



'Lady Justice' above the Town Hall Porch (photo by Lyn John)

His most aggressive adversary in 1901 was the Kaltenbach family, highly regarded in Llanelly as jewellers, watch and clockmakers, and particularly well known for their fine grandfather clocks. In 1897 Henry Kaltenbach had appeared a public-spirited chap, donating 5s 6d (£30 today) to the Llanelly Hospital Jubilee Fund, but he was no stranger to dodgy deals either. The Kaltenbach business originally trading in Neath and Cardiff, was liquidated in 1878, with Mr Kaltenbach declared bankrupt in December 1887¹. Henry Kaltenbach now managed the shop in Douglas Street for the benefit of his creditors, on a wage of £3 per week. He also faced several court actions on charges similar to Riechaelieu's prime tactic, "buy goods - don't pay". To some extent Henry Kaltenbach and Riechaelieu were cut from the same cloth.

¹ Herald of Wales & Monmouth Recorder 18 December 1897 "Llanelly County Court"

The first recorded link between the pair had been in January 1901 when Kaltenbach appeared as a witness in The Great Watch Case. He gave testimony to confirm the status of the rogue watch, but suggested the accused had no reason to cheat. Kaltenbach's measured manner was perhaps explained by newspaper court reports revealing his business connections with Riechaelieu. However this relationship broke down and they faced each other across a courtroom on three separate occasions, in fact three cases in just three months.



Llanelli Court Room ILL4889 2

2) Riechaelieu Sues

Their first encounter was on Wednesday, 13 March 1901². The case was brought by Riechaelieu after Henry Kaltenbach and Joseph Roberts entered his shop in Stepney Street. According to Riechaelieu, Kaltenbach was carrying a cudgel and as they entered, Roberts closed the shop door and stood with his back against it. Kaltenbach had been searching for Riechaelieu for several hours, wanting to redeem goods left in Riechaelieu's possession in his capacity as pawnbroker, but he was shocked at the excessive amount he was asked to pay, and knew he was being swindled.

Riechaelieu claims there was an argument over the bill and while he reached into his safe to retrieve the agreement, Kaltenbach struck him repeatedly about the head and face with his cudgel, knocking out several of his teeth. He claimed Kaltenbach tried to steal the agreement and a struggle ensued. Kaltenbach called Riechaelieu the biggest rogue in town then threatened to 'finish' him. Riechaelieu shouted to his wife to fetch his revolver. P.C. Richards appeared as Riechaelieu was struggling to push Kaltenbach out of his shop.

² Llanelli Mercury 21 March 1901; Cardiff Times 23 March 1901

In court, charged with assault, Henry Kaltenbach denied Riechaelieu's account of the events and claimed Roberts was present purely as a witness because Riechaelieu was widely known as a cheat and a liar. Kaltenbach insisted he was actually there to make a payment of £2 12s 6d to redeem his account. Riechaelieu however wanted £40, considered the offer insufficient, and refused to provide a receipt. Kaltenbach confirmed there was an argument and a struggle but insisted no blows were struck. He had hurled a handful of coins at Riechaelieu.

Unable to reach a decision, the judge dismissed the assault charge. The secondary charge against Kaltenbach of attempted theft of the written agreement was withdrawn. This was a hollow victory for Kaltenbach whose goods were still in Riechaelieu's possession.

3) Kaltenbach Sued

Less than a month later, on 22 April 1901³, Henry Kaltenbach was summoned by Louise's company D.IMR & Co. requiring £40 (over £4,000 today) to settle his bill. Kaltenbach told the court he had deposited goods as security for money owed to Riechaelieu, and wanted to settle his account in order to reclaim his goods. The case considered an argument not submitted at the first trial - whether Kaltenbach had signed an agreement which Riechaelieu had later altered, an act he had been accused of in previous court appearances. The judge noted the case was born largely of animus between the two parties, and the jury returned a verdict for Riechaelieu. It was another defeat for the furious Kaltenbach.

Kaltenbach Counterclaims

A month later, on 21 May 1901⁴, Kaltenbach called Riechaelieu to court to claim £40 for goods given as security for money owed. With his usual effrontery, Riechaelieu simply claimed he had already returned the goods. Kaltenbach's counter claim was rejected. After three cases, Kaltenbach was the loser. The level of animosity between the pair must have been profound, and was certainly the staple of local gossip.

³ South Wales Press 25 April 1901; Cardiff Times 25 May 1901

⁴ Evening Express 29 August 1901

CHAPTER FOUR

The Leather Medal and The Kitson Lights

THE LEATHER MEDAL

It seems astonishing that through the tumult of 1901, fighting so many legal battles on multiple fronts, Riechaelieu would actively seek out further court appearances. But that is precisely what he did between August and November 1901¹ when he brought to the Llanelly Police Court several cases that appeared to have no clear benefit to himself other than keeping his name in public view.

In many ways Riechaelieu's marketing nous was ahead of its time. By 1903 he was using relatively sophisticated promotional devices to advertise his business with slogans like *"Don't give a wedding present to anyone ... unless you give something reliable..."*; *"We hate imposition, we court opposition, we defy competition"* and *"Look for the big Wedding Ring over the doorway"*. He offered an unusual challenge: *"How to earn £20. No catch here! Nothing to sell! The editor of this paper has our cheque and we have authorised him to give it to the first person who claims it under the following conditions..."* This is followed by product advertisements and an invitation to claim the £20 (worth £2,500 today) if the quality and value of the goods has been exaggerated.²

Riechaelieu pursued any action which he thought might keep his name in the public arena. Amongst these were two cases which were of no direct benefit to him - the Leather Medal case and the Kitson Lights case. Neither offered any direct advantage other than maintaining his high profile in the courts and in local newspapers.

On 28 August 1901 Riechaelieu took to the witness box at the Llanelly Police Court. He was not on trial but was present as a witness, probably on matters of drunkenness and public nuisance. He was allowed to address the bench *"....to show the public were willing to assist the police"*. Riechaelieu launched into a rant against rowdyism in the town, lambasting young men leaving pubs late at night and exhibiting *"...general blackguardism and the use of obscene language"*. He claimed it was not the working class, but monied individuals who made it difficult for police by hiring solicitors to 'get up' evidence. So far, so public spirited.

Riechaelieu then used the platform to launch a campaign to award a "leather medal"³ in recognition of bad behaviour. He told the Bench that when a man had done an heroic deed his action was rewarded with a medal. He handed his own medal to the bench, suggesting the offender be invited to come to the court so that a leather medal might be presented to him. The Evening Express reported *"In explanation of the action of Mr Riechaelieu we may say that for some days past he has exhibited in his window a medal made of leather, which according to the card on which it is fixed, is to be presented to the King of the Llanelly Blackguards 1901"*⁴.

¹ South Wales Press 18 September 1902 "Sequel to the Kitson Lights"

² South Wales Press 24 April 1902

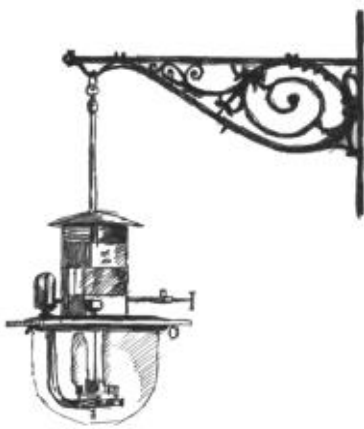
³ Dating from the mid-1800s, a "Leather Medal" is defined on various websites as an imaginary reward for laziness and ineptitude.

⁴ Evening Express 29 August 1901 "Mr. Riechaelieu's Medal - Extraordinary application to the bench"

It is difficult to determine Riechaelieu's motive here. Probably it was self-promotion, to portray himself as an honest and public spirited member of the community, and gain some column inches in the press and perhaps some traction within the trading community. The Court however soon stopped him from completing his speech, and instructed him to step down. He thanked their worships for listening to him.

THE KITSON LIGHTS

In September 1902 the people of Llanelly were becoming increasingly dissatisfied with their new street lighting. The Kitson Empire Lighting Company ⁵ had developed a new system providing gas light more than six times the luminosity of traditional oil lights. But the public's delight quickly turned to anger as the lights became increasingly unreliable, casting parts of the town into "stygian darkness". Riechaelieu took it upon himself to draw attention to the issue on behalf of local tradesmen by bringing flippant charges against an innocent man.



Kitson light with wall bracket. Artwork by John Wynne Hopkins.

In an attempt to mock the Council and their new lights, Riechaelieu had placed some fairy lamps and notices written on card inside the gas pillars. Arthur Ransome Rowe was instructed by his employer, the Urban Council, to remove these. When challenged by Riechaelieu, Rowe simply laughed at him. Riechaelieu promptly called the police, claiming Rowe was stealing his property. Riechaelieu was well aware that Rowe was simply doing his job as a Council employee, but accompanied him as he was apprehended and taken to the police station. Riechaelieu appeared to find the episode amusing, and when questioned, he added further items to the list of things Rowe had 'stolen' in the course of his employment. Riechaelieu claimed no animosity towards Rowe, acknowledging he was simply carrying out his employer's instructions. But Rowe must have been surprised when as a result of Riechaelieu's claims, he found he was to be charged with larceny. In a bizarre twist, and perhaps for the first and only time showing the faintest sign of remorse, Riechaelieu offered to provide Rowe's bail.⁶

Riechaelieu's initial motive for bringing the charges appears altruistic, drawing attention to the failing street lighting on behalf of local tradesmen. The arrest of the hapless Rowe appeared to be a convenient means for Riechaelieu to highlight the matter, but Riechaelieu's real motive was revealed in court. Mr Perrot, a witness, claimed Riechaelieu had told him, *"Can't you see through the joke? It has nothing to do with you. I am fighting the Urban Council. Besides, it is a good advertisement for me. I don't mind if the case costs me £10".*⁷

D. IMR & Co.
ART JEWELLERS,
And WATCHMAKERS,
43, STEPNEY STREET
(Opposite the Arcade), LLANELLY.

Deal direct with us and save the middlemen's profit. We will make up any article in gold or silver goods, from your own design, without any extra charge for special work.

Look for the Big Wedding Ring over the Doorway.

PRIVATE ROOM for Wedding Ring customers. All rings sold by weight. A handsome present given with each ring.

*South Wales Press 4th April
1902*

⁵ Wikipedia.org Arthur Kitson

⁶ South Wales Press 18 September 1902 "Sequel to the Kitson Lights"

Astonishingly, Riechaelieu was allowed to conduct a cross examination. He makes it clear he has no animosity towards Rowe - his real adversary is the Urban Council and their failing lighting system. The court dismissed all charges against Rowe and admonished Riechaelieu for bringing the charge, advising him that he should have consulted a solicitor first.

Rowe remained rightly upset that what started as a joke, had ended in his apprehension. Two months later he launched a counterclaim, charging Riechaelieu with wrongful imprisonment⁸. Rowe was awarded five guineas (£800 today). Riechaelieu was ordered to pay not only the court costs, but extra fees for his solicitor. He had only himself to blame for this needless and costly action, but with his usual vengeful attitude he was determined not to pay the penalty the courts had imposed. The Llanelli & County Guardian 9 August 1906 reported *"So as to avoid payment of a small claim for wrongful imprisonment he went into bankruptcy..."*

Riechaelieu's showboating certainly kept him in the public eye. He never missed an opportunity to argue with or ridicule a prosecution counsel - something in which he revelled.

Ominously, the minor and inconsequential actions of 1901-2 were about to be overtaken by something quite different. The tumultuous, life-changing events on his horizon were on a quite different scale from these minor legal skirmishes. In the next three years his actions and his need for revenge, would be raised to a level that risked everything - his business, his marriage, his family and indeed his life.

⁷ South Wales Press 18 September 1902

⁸ South Wales Press 20 November 1902; "Mr. Riechaelieu's Practical Joke"; Cardiff Times 22 November 1902 "False Imprisonment"

CHAPTER FIVE

Bankruptcy and Solomon Chinn

Following the financial penalties meted out in the Rowe case, Riechaelieu's petition for bankruptcy was made public in January 1903 ¹. His case opened on 11 February and was quickly adjourned. The case was resumed on Wednesday 4 March 1903, when Riechaelieu appeared before the Official Receiver at Carmarthen Bankruptcy Court. The company D.IMR & Co, was not under scrutiny - Riechaelieu had already transferred the company, which represented his entire wealth, to his wife. His intention was to be declared personally bankrupt in what appeared to be another manoeuvre to avoid his financial responsibilities.

Riechaelieu had a long-running feud with the solicitor representing his creditors that day. He had clashed with his long-time nemesis Mr D R Edmunds several times before, most recently six months earlier, when he had been convicted of causing the unlawful imprisonment of Arthur Rowe, a Council workman. Edmunds had represented the unfortunate Rowe, in a case where Riechaelieu's motive was self-promotion and simply having a bit of fun at the poor man's expense. On that occasion Edmunds had been thorough and Riechaelieu had received an unexpected legal mauling. The court had not been amused and Riechaelieu had been ordered to pay a hefty fine plus all costs and legal fees amounting to what would have been many thousands of pounds today. But Riechaelieu had a strategy - bankruptcy.

Edmunds had correctly guessed Riechaelieu's reasons for declaring himself bankrupt. This was later confirmed in the press *"So as to avoid payment of a small claim for wrongful imprisonment, [Riechaelieu] went into bankruptcy...."* ². With his knowledge of Riechaelieu, Edmunds was perfectly placed to make his escape plan as difficult and as public as possible, which is exactly what he did and, it would appear, with some relish.

In court the gloves came off from the start. Riechaelieu made his views known immediately, declaring respect for everyone in court, with the exception of Mr Edmunds. This drew an instant rebuke from the Registrar for his behaviour. His antics were well known and probably anticipated, but he was told bluntly that if he did not conduct himself properly the case would go before a Judge where he could be held in contempt for such remarks. But Edmunds wasn't bothered, he was ready for a fight.

In the unfamiliar arena of the Carmarthen court, away from his usual Llanelly Police Court, Riechaelieu had more freedom to employ his usual diversionary tactics, and had Edmunds not been there, he may have got away with it, but Edmunds ruined everything. Riechaelieu suddenly developed a Spanish accent, and requested the court's indulgence because he was a foreigner and unable to follow the cross examination. Edmunds knew this was a theatrical ploy to avoid giving clear answers.³ Riechaelieu's smokescreening, disinformation, and faked poor understanding of English, were all rendered useless. Referring to Riechaelieu's new accent, Edmunds reassured the

¹ Evening Express & Evening Mail 10 January 1903 "Gazette Notices"

² Llanelly & County Guardian 9 August 1906 "Llanelly Sensation"

³ Llanelly & County Guardian 9 August 1906 "Llanelly Sensation"

court, with mock surprise, that Riechaelieu had spoken remarkably good English back in Llanelly. Riechaelieu was furious, and was again admonished by the Registrar, this time for feigning ignorance of events.

Edmunds had little trouble branding Riechaelieu a villain, addressing his criminal record, and informing the court he had only recently been sued by Mr Vaughan Evans, a jeweller in Cowell Street. Riechaelieu's terse response was that he had "...paid [Evans] a horsewhipping" ⁴. Edmunds suggested Riechaelieu had threatened many people with horse whipping, which prompted his extraordinary outburst "*I have not threatened to horsewhip you... YET!*". Riechaelieu was fortunate that the session was not suspended for this direct physical threat to the prosecution counsel. As Riechaelieu was losing control, Edmunds was warming up, and responded with an antagonistic "*Ah, know your man!*". You can almost hear the taunt in his words.

Things were not going well. When Edmunds began his questioning about the value of the stock held by D.IMR & Co, Riechaelieu, correctly, claimed he had no control over the business. He refused point blank to answer questions, accusing Edmunds of impertinence. Again the Registrar cautioned him.

Then Edmunds returned to an old favourite - the claim often made in Riechaelieu's court appearances, and one absolutely certain to rile him. Edmunds accused Irdan Miguel Riechaelieu, gallant Spanish soldier, of really being the rather unremarkable John William Townsend, of Norwich. For years, every time this charge had been put to him, Riechaelieu had vehemently denied it, and he was incensed that it should be raised again now. But in a fit of pique Riechaelieu revealed something hitherto unknown - or perhaps simply something he created on the spot. He claimed that John William Townshend was his father's illegitimate son, who had contracted for business using Riechaelieu's name. Riechaelieu claimed he had settled Townsend's debts rather than bring his own name into disrepute. As we will later see, it is more likely that Townsend really *was* Riechaelieu's real name which he had abandoned, along with enemies and bad debts, back in Norwich before moving to Llanelly. Now grandstanding outrageously, Riechaelieu went on to proclaim to the court his heritage and kinship to Cardinal Richelieu ⁵, claiming he was born in Seville, Spain, and had fought heroically under the Union flag in the Transvaal. Then, in what was probably his most outrageous ruse so far, he explained how his memory was defective following an injury sustained in the Matabele War ⁶ which had required treatment by trepanning (drilling a hole directly into the skull) ⁷. It was the one and only time this excuse was ever mentioned. It really was the most credibility-stretching stuff.

While Riechaelieu became increasingly angry, Edmunds appeared to be enjoying himself. He now wanted to know about jewellery Riechaelieu had recently disposed of at vastly reduced value, which prompted more sharp exchanges. When Edmunds made a direct reference to Riechaelieu's mental state saying, "*There is a place for a person who is suffering mentally*". Riechaelieu snapped back, "*You tried to lock me up before..... I am as sane as you are!*".

⁴ Weekly Mail 7 March 1903 "Llanelly Bankrupt"

⁵ Cardinal Richelieu, Armand Jean du Plessis, Duke of Richelieu, (1585-1642) French cleric and statesman.

⁶ Matabele Wars: First Matabele War 1893-4, Second Matabele War 1896-7

⁷ Carmarthen Weekly Reporter 20 February 1903 "Strange Story of a Llanelly Bankrupt"

Relentless, Edmunds now drew attention to the jewellery Riechaelieu was wearing. It was perhaps rather foolish to flaunt jewellery while standing in the dock facing bankruptcy, but predictably, Riechaelieu brushed it off. He minimised the value of everything, and sarcastically offered to sell Edmunds his watch for 2s. 6d. and his chain for 1s. Then in a reference to an outstanding debt, probably that from the Rowe case, Riechaelieu taunted Edmunds, saying he would be paid if he were a gentleman.

This was a reference to some of Riechaelieu's liabilities being covered by his wife, Louise. Riechaelieu is suggesting that his liabilities arising from the Rowe case, of which Edmunds' fee formed a part, and which was the reason for his bankruptcy trial, might be paid by Riechaelieu's wife. But telling Edmunds he might get paid *"...if he is a gentleman"* was a typically vengeful and unnecessarily personal taunt ⁸.

Edmunds persisted, asking Riechaelieu to describe the jewellery he was wearing. Riechaelieu replied, *"I refuse to answer"*. He was dangerously close to contempt now, and this remark drew the court's strongest rebuke yet. Mr Trubshaw, the judge, told him bluntly, *"If you don't answer the questions put to you, we shall adjourn the case and remand you in custody"*. Riechaelieu now had no choice but to concede.

Edmunds had made his case well, leaving Riechaelieu branded not just a bankrupt, but a liar to boot. The court heard he had no assets, and debts totalling £51 2s.3d. (about £6,000 today), which was roughly equal to his legal obligations for the Rowe case. One wonders if Riechaelieu saw the irony when he laughably placed the blame for his bankruptcy on having to pay for goods not supplied and for his legal expenses.

The court recorded his creditors, including a claim for jewellery, another for a bicycle, both disputed by Riechaelieu, and a third claim for legal proceedings, most likely the aftermath of the Rowe case. Riechaelieu then showed the court his contrition, claiming nobody understood the difficulties he had to contend with.

The examination was closed and as an individual, Riechaelieu was now officially bankrupt. D.IMR & Co was already entirely owned by his wife, Louise, with Riechaelieu reduced to being her employee, without assets or business interest, unable to trade under his own name. In practice of course, his aggressive control over his wife meant he still managed D.IMR & Co as if it belonged to him. His dodgy deals continued, but henceforth he was unable to claim these were on behalf of anyone but himself. If only Louise had had the courage, she could have walked away from this awful man, with everything.

The Llanelly press well knew Riechaelieu's reputation, his fights with Henry Kaltenbach, the turmoil of the Great Watch Case, 1901, and his much reported bankruptcy. Such was his reputation, the press were perhaps hoping for a newsworthy repetition, and quickly badged his latest fight *The Llanelly Watch Case*. There was no doubt about it - Riechaelieu sold newspapers.

⁸ Weekly Mail 7 March 1903

Russell Davies' book *Secret Sins - Sex, Violence and Society in Carmarthenshire 1870-1920*⁹ describes the Llanelli people's love of a good courtroom spectacle, especially when salacious sexual misdemeanours were revealed. Riechaelieu's reputation for a fight was well known, and this latest case held great entertainment potential. So prolific were his court appearances and such was the distrust he had brought upon his profession, his relationship with his local tradesmen would have been extremely difficult. One can only imagine the level of gossip on the streets as another high-profile legal fight between Llanelli's jewellers hit the headlines. And the Llanelli press were quickly on it. It was certain to be worth watching, and Riechaelieu didn't let them down.

Now a bankrupt, and with a seemingly inexhaustible appetite for confrontation, in July 1903, he became embroiled in an altercation with Solomon Chinn, a 25 year old Russian Jew, who managed a jewellery business in Cowell Street. Chinn charged Riechaelieu with stealing six silver watches.

The case was simple enough. Chinn had six English lever watches on approval from Messrs John Hawley & Co, and had agreed to sell them, presumably for a quick profit, to Riechaelieu. He took the watches to Riechaelieu's shop one Sunday afternoon. According to Chinn's testimony Riechaelieu took the watches and while he reached for his cheque book he asked Chinn to sign the receipt stating he had been paid. Then Riechaelieu decided he would instead pay by cash and he gathered the watches, cheque book and the signed receipt book and left the room. When he returned he had no money for Chinn, but simply handed over a dirty piece of paper saying "Here is your receipt". Astonished at this brazen swindle, Chinn demanded payment or the return of his watches, and if he didn't get one or the other he would call a policeman. Then things got rough. The two men struggled and Riechaelieu pushed Chinn out of the back door where he was attacked by Riechaelieu's dog. Chinn went straight to the police. Riechaelieu was arrested, charged and released on bail. Inevitably it ended in court. What became apparent from Chinn's accusations was that although bankrupt, Riechaelieu was still very much in charge of D.IMR & Co - doing dodgy deals and controlling the money, while Louise, the legal owner, was forced to defer to him and bear responsibility for the consequences.

The Llanelli Watch Case opened on 2 July 1903 in the relatively low key Llanelli Police Court where it was adjourned until 15 July. When the case resumed, Riechaelieu was defended by Mr Ludford, and the prosecution was Riechaelieu's old enemy, Mr D R Edmunds.

Edmunds started with a full-on attack, advising the court that Riechaelieu was in the habit of carrying a firearm, and had already threatened to shoot the learned counsel

for the prosecution, i.e. himself. Edmunds asked that the prisoner be searched. Riechaelieu was taken down, searched by a warder, then returned to the court where he pleaded not guilty to all charges.

The questioning began with Edmunds asking the defendant's name. "*Irdan Riechaelieu*", he replied. In a reference to Riechaelieu's aliases, Edmunds then asked, "*Have you ever gone by the*

⁹ "Secret Sins - Sex, Violence and Society in Carmarthenshire, 1870-1920" Russell Davies, University of Wales Press, 1996 ISBN 0-7083-1367-1

name of Townsend?”. “*Have you ever changed your shirt?*” snapped Riechaelieu¹⁰ The court erupted with laughter - this is what they had come to see. There were long acrimonious exchanges between the two and eventually the case was further adjourned to be sent for trial by jury at the Carmarthen Quarter Sessions, such was the gravity of the case. Riechaelieu was still a prisoner on a very serious charge, and required bail. The court noted Louise was the owner of the stock, the house and property¹¹ accepting she would pay surety. Riechaelieu’s bail was set at £25 (£3,000 today).

The case came before a jury on 23 October 1903. Until now Riechaelieu had enjoyed legal representation, but this time, before a jury, in a crucial confrontation, he conducted his own defence.¹² Perhaps it was his bankruptcy and lack of cash that prevented him hiring a lawyer, or maybe it was sheer bravado and self belief that he could do the job himself. Electing to defend himself was extremely risky. He was certainly no stranger to court procedure, but he wasn’t a lawyer.

When Riechaelieu began his cross examination of Chinn, who was under oath, it was clear they hated each other and there were colourful exchanges from the start. Riechaelieu first set about demolishing Chinn’s reputation, but Chinn knew his adversary. “*Why Did you leave Russia?*” asked Riechaelieu. “*Why did you leave Spain?*” replied Chinn, referring to Riechaelieu’s fake identities. The court erupted with laughter. Riechaelieu then tried to brand Chinn as a coward. “*Did the Russian authorities have a warrant out for your apprehension for not serving your military service?*” “No”, replied Chinn. “*Did you leave [Russia] to avoid it?*” “Yes”. “*Why did you leave Aberdare?*” “*Because I like Llanelly*”. The court erupted with laughter again.

This was great fun for the gallery, but it wasn’t going well for Riechaelieu. The judge rebuked Riechaelieu several times for aggressive questioning but he persisted, trying to brand Chinn a cheat, who bought large amounts of stock which he sold cheaply to ‘thieves and fences’. Then in a sudden burst of public spirit, Riechaelieu claimed it had been his objective all along to end such doubtful practice in the town, and protect his fellow tradesmen from such rogues. He asked the court, “*Have I made it my hobby, if any occasion of roguery is brought to my notice to spend money and time to unravel it if I can?*”¹³. Riechaelieu’s hypocrisy really knew no bounds and this claim must have caused much mirth in the gallery.

By defending himself, Riechaelieu had elected not to enter the witness box for cross examination. This proved to be a fatal mistake. In his summing up, the Judge said Riechaelieu had cast serious allegations on Chinn’s solvency and reputation and had portrayed him as a villain. But Chinn’s was the only evidence given under oath. Then referring to Riechaelieu’s aggressive questioning, the judge addressed the jury -

“Unfortunately there is little evidence to support these claims, and the only person who could have entered the witness box to provide that evidence under oath, was Riechaelieu himself. And he chose

¹⁰ South Wales Press 16 July 1903 "The Riechaelieu Case"

¹¹ It is unlikely that Louise owned the property. In 1906 an insurance claim noted that the property was owned by a Mr Wade.

¹² South Wales Press 29 October 1903 "Riechaelieu's Trick"

¹³ Carmarthen Journal 30 October 1903 "Larceny By A Trick"

not to do so". Riechaelieu had overlooked a simple legal procedure that rendered his questioning inadmissible while Chinn's evidence under oath, remained admissible.

On 23 October 1903, Irdan Miguel Riechaelieu was found guilty of Larceny ('*by a trick*'), and was sentenced to six months imprisonment. Chinn was delighted, while Riechaelieu couldn't believe what had happened. Newspaper reports describe how he appeared to faint and stumble as the sentence was read aloud across the court. Then, in a collapsed state, he had to be helped from the Court, down the stairs to the cells below.

This was at least his second prison term for Larceny. He knew what to expect, and it wasn't pretty. Victorian prisons were intended as an unpleasant deterrent. Mostly small, they were usually old, badly-run, frequently damp, unhealthy, unsanitary and overcrowded. Often they held all kinds of prisoners - men, women, children, serious and petty criminals alike, debtors, and even the mentally ill and innocent people awaiting trial. Riechaelieu had six long months ahead of him but he was soon planning revenge.

Riechaelieu served his time but there is a fascinating postscript, recording his vicious acts of revenge against Chinn.¹⁴

In October 1903, Riechaelieu was serving his prison sentence when the Llanelly Police Court heard a case brought by George Davies of Stoke Newington, London, charging Chinn with acting under false pretences. Chinn's counsel was once again, Mr D R Edmunds - the man who had derailed more of Riechaelieu's court actions than anybody else. Edmunds told the court that George Davies had not appeared to pursue the prosecution, and that the case had been instigated by Riechaelieu who was currently in gaol, having been convicted at Carmarthen for the theft from the defendant. Edmunds told the court that Riechaelieu had "*...concocted a story and induced this man, who was a London manufacturer, to be a tool in his hands, to place Chinn in a difficult position.*"¹⁵ He went on to explain that unless unscrupulous men like Riechaelieu were stopped, more charges of a similar nature would be brought. Of course without the Plaintiff, the case could not proceed. It was instead referred to the Public Prosecutor, probably a means of preventing Riechaelieu from repeating his actions. But Riechaelieu was not finished yet and he soon set about destroying Chinn for good.

Riechaelieu's second plan was simple but devastating and must have been planned during his incarceration in gaol. Around the time of his release, Chinn was in France, and in his absence Riechaelieu wrote to many of Chinn's suppliers, suggesting financial problems, and implying Chinn had absconded to Europe to avoid his creditors. Consequently Chinn faced a sudden barrage of suppliers demanding immediate payment, giving him a huge cash-flow problem. Bankruptcy proceedings were brought by Messrs Constantine & Floyd of Birmingham who alleged "*...as an act of bankruptcy, the debtor has left the country with intent to defeat or delay proceedings of his creditors*". In Chinn's absence the Bankruptcy Court heard how he had been unaware of the charge, and was absent on medical advice. He was coughing blood and had travelled abroad for his health.

¹⁴ The Weekly Mail 5 December 1903; Cardiff Times 5 December 1903; Evening Express 6 January 1904

¹⁵ The Cardiff Times 31 October 1903 "Charge of False Pretences"

Chinn did however eventually return to Llanelly to face the court. When asked if he blamed Riechaelieu's letters for his predicament, he told the court *"Yes. He sent a lot of them and I attribute my present difficulties to him. Creditors pressed me before the money was due because of him"*.¹⁶

Chinn's liability in today's money was close to £100,000. He was ruined. The bankruptcy hearing was adjourned until 6 April, however the Registrar noted the bankrupt may never appear again as he was in a low physical condition, and offered a medical certificate to support this. Chinn quickly returned to Europe, probably for his health, and perhaps to avoid his creditors for real. Along with suggestions of serious illness, there is evidence that before he left the country, he put a process in place to consolidate his assets and pay his debts at 10s. in the pound. There is no record of Chinn's Llanelly bankruptcy proceedings being concluded. Chinn was never heard of again.

¹⁶ Evening Express 6 January 1904

CHAPTER SIX

Truth and Lies

False Notes, False Identities, Illness, Suicide and Firearms

1906 was Riechaelieu's *annus horribilis*. A sequence of events unfolded that would change his life forever, laying waste his business, his family and his well-being, in ways he could not have imagined. Before setting out Riechaelieu's catastrophic year, it is worth stepping back to take a closer look at his life of deception and lies.

False dates

Most legal documents bearing Riechaelieu's name contain contradictory information. It is odd why a man should want to disguise his past, and so determinedly mislead people all his life. But there is no doubt that for decades Riechaelieu deceived family, friends, business colleagues and the legal system without compunction. For example when he married Louise in 1886 he was 30; when he re-married 29 years later he was just 37.

				Year of Birth
1886	Wedding Certificate #1	stated age	30	= 1856
1903	Prison record/Chinn case	stated age	45	= 1858
1911	Census	stated age	39	= 1872
1913	Wedding Certificate #2	stated age	37	= 1876
1915	Death Certificate	stated age	59	= 1856
1928	Louise's USA emigration	stated age	62	= 1866

False Identities

A recurring and confusing tactic in Riechaelieu's courtroom battles was his use of *alter egos*. Indeed the very name Riechaelieu is probably an affectation. He was quick to remind people of his brave, heroic past, working in the Transvaal spying for the Secret Service, reporting covert Boer activity, locations of armaments dumps and minefields, whilst wielding his pistol in swashbuckling fashion, defending the Union flag at every opportunity. But in multiple court appearances prosecutors accused him of being one of at least four other people. The most common accusation being that he was really John William Townsend, of Norwich, an ordinary, working class boy, who attended St Edwards Norwich Blue Coat School, a charity institution founded in the 16th century¹ where pupils wore a distinctive blue frock coat synonymous, in its day, with penury.

Riechaelieu once claimed not to know his own family. On another occasion, he mentions his father and an illegitimate brother. On his wedding certificate to Louise, his father's name appears as Don Irdan Riechaelieu, but on his wedding certificate to Jesse, it appears as Irdan Alfonso Riechaelieu.

¹ Llanelly & County Guardian 9 August 1906 "Llanelly Sensation"

Riechaelieu later claimed his father was Spanish Consul in Seville which, had it been so, and given his propensity for grandstanding, he would surely have recorded this on these certificates. Instead the father's profession appeared vaguely as 'Gentleman' and 'of independent means'. There is also evidence of a Don Riechaelieu winning prizes for his pigeons and cavies² in Norfolk livestock shows, before Riechaelieu came to Llanelli. Perhaps his father Don, also kept pigeons and cavies. Or perhaps Don was Riechaelieu's real first name. He was referred to as such in several newspaper reports.³ "Don" would also better explain the name of his company - D.IMR & Co.

During a court appearance in 1903, Riechaelieu was again accused of being John Townsend, and after years of denial, for the first time he acknowledged a connection. He claimed he had a troublesome half brother, which was reported thus "*The man Townsend...was [my] mother's [later corrected to Father's] illegitimate son who had on several occasions contracted debts in [my] name... which I had settled rather than bring the family's name into disrepute.*"⁴ This seems unlikely as Riechaelieu does not appear to have any family other than his wife and child. The Riechaelieu family line does not appear in any census of the area while the Townsend line with likely connections is evident in Norwich.

A more likely scenario can be found fifteen years before his arrival in Llanelli. In 1888 one of his employees was charged with damaging his Norwich shop. Newspapers reported graffiti on the shutters - "*Mr Riechaelieu, Esq, rogue, thief, liar, you damned liar, your proper name is John William Townsend*".⁵

In what could be just a fascinating coincidence, either Riechaelieu (or John William Townsend) from Norwich, charged *Walter Frederick* Townsend, also of Norwich, with criminal damage. It appears to be two brothers at war.

There is no formal link between the names Riechaelieu and Townsend. The 1871 Census reveals that Nathaniel and Amelia Townsend from Norwich, had two sons - John William (b.1866) and Walter Frederick (b.1870). Riechaelieu claimed he had an illegitimate half-brother, yet these two brothers' birth certificates and their parentage are unremarkable, while Riechaelieu has no birth certificate, British or Spanish, and his name appears only on documents he completed himself. Perhaps it was Riechaelieu who was the illegitimate son, or perhaps the Riechaelieu name was simply created to disguise a shady past.

Riechaelieu was quick to declare his loyalty to the Empire, but apart from his own outrageous claims, there is no record of his much-boasted of military career, let alone any acts of gallantry. Ironically it was his putative brother Walter who had a distinguished military career in South Africa, receiving the Victory and British War medals.⁶ It seems that Riechaelieu, whether a real or imagined character, attempted to personify everything Walter had actually achieved. Walter died in Transvaal Estates, South Africa in 1934.⁷

² South American rodent of the family *Caviidae*: includes the domestic guinea pig.

³ The Weekly Mail 21 February 1903

⁴ Cardiff Times 14 February 1903 "Descendant of Great Cardinal"

⁵ The Norwich Mercury 27 June 1888; The Lowestoft Journal 30 June 1888

⁶ Walter Frederick Townsend Regimental No. 657948 Rank PVT, Previous Units 13229 RFN RIF. BRIG.

⁷ National Archives, Pretoria, South Africa

Riechaelieu was married three times. The first is a mystery, and is only revealed by his 'Widower' status on the certificate of his second marriage in 1886 to Louise Smith Perren. His third marriage was to the writer's grandmother, Caroline "Jesse" Watkeys.

Riechaelieu's status on his 1886 wedding certificate to Louise appears as 'Widower', but there is no evidence of a previous Riechaelieu wedding. There is however a wedding certificate for John Townsend and Mary Ann Brown in Norwich, six years earlier. The dates and the location fit the 'John Townsend' theory, but there is no death or divorce record for Mary Ann Brown. One wonders what happened to Mary Ann if bigamy or something worse might be added to Riechaelieu's list of offences.

In 1901 during the Riechaelieu *versus* Kaltenbach actions, under cross-examination Riechaelieu, was again tackled on his identity. This time the prosecution charged him with using the name Dan Towan. *Are you a Spaniard? A spy in Transvaal? "I was appointed Consul under the British Government". Did you go about town as Dan Towan? "No. And you know that Dan Towan was convicted for using my name"*. Riechaelieu had used precisely the same response when accused of being John William Townsend. During The Great Watch Case 1901, the prosecution counsel wanted to reveal more about the mysterious Dan Towan. Unfortunately the bench decided that this line of questioning would not assist the case and the information was never heard.

There are no records of a fraud conviction for Dan Towan, however the name appears in connection with a failed watchmaking company in Goole, Lincolnshire. In 1897 Riechaelieu was Managing Director of The Watch Company in Boothferry Road, Goole, a consortium which raised £20,000 (a staggering £2.5m today) through a publicly advertised shares issue⁸. But just six months later the County Court of Yorkshire was hearing a petition to wind up the company, with assets of just £900⁹. In court Riechaelieu denied wrongdoing and true to form set about confusing the story by misquoting the company value, giving incorrect dates and being evasive about his level of involvement. He was accused of running a company under an alias and two years later he and his co-conspirator Albert Sykes, faced public examination. Concluding the case, the Official Liquidator gave the Notice of Release¹⁰. The outcome of the financial loss, today worth £2.3m is not recorded and Riechaelieu, although a Managing Director, does not appear to have been held accountable.

On at least one occasion, Riechaelieu had traded using his wife's maiden name of Perrin¹¹. During the Great Watch Case, he was linked to shady deals of imported fake gold dust from South Africa, and declined to explain the identity of a mysterious Mr Brazell, claiming that this was a matter between the Treasury and the South African Government. Curious links to South Africa would recur throughout his life, as would accusations about his real identity.

Illness

Evidence suggesting that Riechaelieu suffered enduring mental health problems is strong. That he was disturbed and suicidal is a matter of record. His brutal physical attacks, often on his wife, his delusions of grandeur and deep depressions, an irrational self-belief, and a tendency to self-harm

⁸ Sheffield Daily Telegraph 19 August 1897 Public Notices: Shares Issue The Watch Company (Limited)

⁹ The London Gazette 18 January; 18/21 February; 24 April 1898

¹⁰ South Wales Press 17 January 1901

¹¹ Llanelly & County Guardian 9 August 1906 "Llanelly Sensation"

were some of his symptoms. He was at one stage formally detained at Swansea Infirmary diagnosed with “*delusions, with suicidal tendencies*”. As his story unfolds, his brutality and self-destructive streak became increasingly determined.

While a diagnosis is not possible, the evidence suggests Riechaelieu may have been bipolar, possibly with personality disorder and periods of depression and hypomania. He exhibited symptoms of paranoia and psychosis and his fantasy-like imagination was also suggestive of tertiary stage syphilis. He was an habitual laudanum user which would have made his symptoms worse.

Suicide and Firearms

Until the 1961 Suicide Act, attempting suicide was a criminal offence. If you survived, you faced prosecution. After Riechaelieu’s first suicide attempt in Hull, he appeared in court, was found guilty, and bound over.

Newspapers reported at least six other suicide attempts between 1892 and 1915. His wife’s divorce petition identified several more. One attempt actually took place inside a County Court where he was appearing on an assault charge. In 1906 the proprietor of a hotel where Riechaelieu was staying gave details of still more attempts. His -weapon of choice was laudanum - a form of heroin freely available in Edwardian England. Most chemists sold it and most homes had a bottle in the bathroom cabinet. An ounce of laudanum contained one gram of opium. It was commonly used for aches and pains, insomnia and relaxation. There are reports of mothers dipping a finger into the dark red liquid and administering it to restless babies. Laudanum was widely used by poets and artists, and its common use suggests a social function, in the way some people today might use marijuana.

Riechaelieu habitually kept a pistol and more than once boasted to a courtroom about his days as a Secret Agent, bravely confronting local *Landdrost* (local African leaders) in the Transvaal, and with typical self-aggrandisement claimed he was forced to wield his revolver with patriotic gusto to keep the Union flag flying over his house.

Riechaelieu reached for his pistol whenever he became angry. In her divorce petition, Louise recalled on many occasions Riechaelieu threatened to shoot her and daughter Gladys. In 1891 in Hull, he actually fired shots at her. In 1901 during his fight with Henry Kaltenbach, he shouted for his wife to fetch his pistol. Then in 1906 when his Stepney Street premises were in danger of being consumed by fire, there remained unanswered questions over the pistol shots fired as police attempted to enter the burning building to rescue the inhabitants. And as the rest of this story will show, he once turned his pistol on himself, with devastating consequences.

By 1906 The Great Watch Case of 1901 was a distant memory, but Llanelly’s traders knew Riechaelieu was prepared to lie, cheat, and employ extreme violence against those who dared challenged him. With his swindling, confrontational manner, and possession of a pistol, his reputation grew. He had rapidly reached pariah status amongst the Llanelly trading community. In court, his fanciful exaggerations bordering on the delusional, and his blatant untruths placed him constantly at war with the law.

He became someone best avoided in business. Newspapers however, couldn't get enough of this extraordinary man and their coverage of him suggests he was extremely good for sales. His lies and deception, sometimes adopting a Spanish accent and faltering English to pretend he could not understand cross examination, were tactics which led to amusing courtroom exchanges. Aggressive exchanges with prosecution lawyers were commonplace. Riechaelieu would often verbally abuse his prosecutors, and had several times threatened counsel with physical violence in open court, which enhanced his reputation with the public even more.

The newspapers and the public loved these stories. There may even have been a grain of truth in some of his fantasies. Claims to have been appointed Spanish Consul by the British Government, and to have been descended from Cardinal Richelieu¹², were perhaps a little extreme, but did show just how far Riechaelieu would go with his self-aggrandisement.

¹² Cardinal Richelieu, Armand Jean du Plessis, Duke of Richelieu, (1585-1642) French cleric and statesman

CHAPTER SEVEN

Marriage Breakdown and the Stepney Street Fire

After the Great Watch Case of 1901 and a gruelling succession of court actions over the next few years, the pressure on Riechaelieu was immense. There had been numerous battles against individuals like Mayer Blenkinsee and Henry Kaltenbach, numerous one-offs against individuals, and several pointless cases whose only purpose appears to have been to keep Riechaelieu's name in the newspapers. Then in 1903 he was declared bankrupt and later that year came the disastrous Llanelly Watch Case brought by Solomon Chinn, which led to his imprisonment and Chinn's bankruptcy. But things were about to get worse.

On his release from prison Riechaelieu's life remained relatively quiet for two years. but as blow after self-inflicted blow pushed him further into depression and despair, 1906 unleashed an ugly sequence of events which would transform his life.

This was Riechaelieu's *annus horribilis*. It had begun a week earlier on Christmas Day 1905. Louise finally gave up on this controlling, abusive, violent and life-threatening relationship. She found the courage, and with the support of friends, finally left her husband, taking their daughter Gladys, with her. Her friends secured accommodation for them in the next building at 45 Stepney Street, and got an assurance from Riechaelieu that he would make no contact with her. He was not one to bow to authority or threats, and one wonders what was said and by whom to make him keep his distance.

Now, after years of enduring her husband's violent temper, beatings, adultery, threats and indeed attempts at murder, Louise had walked away. Leaving was a profoundly courageous act on her part, and must have brought a huge sense of relief, tempered with her knowledge of her husband's potential for revenge. There is evidence that Louise had support from Mr Poole, an Auctioneer, William Morris who would later become her business partner, and a third person named Walton. It seems likely they were helping her to acknowledge her strong financial position, i.e. ownership of the business and the stock of gold and silver. Or perhaps their motives were not entirely altruistic, and they had one eye on the company assets. There is suggestion of a relationship with one of the three men, but there is scant detail. What is clear however is that by helping Louise, these men became the focus of Riechaelieu's rage, and less than six months later their names appeared scrawled on the wall of a deserted building, in a desperate suicide note.

As 1905 slipped away and the New Year arrived, Riechaelieu was in the cellar tending his cavies ¹, rabbits, pigeons and dogs, where he also stored his straw, paraffin and coal. Riechaelieu tended his animals and as usual, enjoyed a cigarette. His wife and child were in an upstairs room in the adjacent building.

¹ The cavy is a rodent of the *Caviidae* family native to South America and is also known as the guinea pig. Despite their common name, guinea pigs are not native to Guinea, nor are they biologically related to pigs.

Contemporary weather reports show that New Year's morning arrived cold and clear, with a fresh south westerly. Party revellers were gone, and the town was quiet when Constable Hugh Thomas patrolled in the early hours. At 5.20am, as he walked along Stepney Street he noticed smoke spewing from the cellar grills of Riechaelieu's shop². Springing into action, he blew his whistle loudly to summon help and to alert the building's occupants. He instructed a boy named Vivian, from nearby Church Street, to fetch the Fire Brigade with great haste.

Constable Thomas could see smoke inside the building and tried to force the front gates. As he did so, he heard a pistol shot from inside the building. A neighbour shouted to Thomas “ *Leave the gates alone*’, *he is shouting*” indicating that Riechaelieu didn't want the gates forced open - an odd request when lives were in danger. Constable Thomas now knew there was someone inside, that they were aware, and in grave danger. This was a very serious situation but nobody was attempting to escape the building. Thomas continued struggling to open the gate. Then came a second gunshot from above the policeman's head.

Stepney Street was waking up. People were gathering. Thomas went through a neighbour's house to the rear of the burning shop, only to find the rear door securely locked. Thomas later said he was at the building for almost fifteen minutes before he had any response. Then he spotted Louise at an upper window and shouted for her to throw down the keys.

Newspaper reports suggest Louise and Gladys were on the upper floor in Riechaelieu's shop at no. 43, but given they had recently left him, it seems more likely they were resident next door in no. 45, the premises that friends had secured for them. It made little difference in terms of their safety however, because the buildings were terraced, and one of them was burning.

At the back of the building, despite Thomas' repeated shouting, nobody had responded. Clearly if action wasn't taken soon, those inside would perish if their only route of escape was on fire. With rising concern Thomas returned to the front of the building and this time forced the shop gates but frustrated, still could not get into the building. Minutes later he returned to the rear door and was relieved to find it open and Louise and her thirteen year old daughter, partly dressed, standing in the kitchen. Thomas asked where was her husband “*Oh God*” she cried, “*He is upstairs somewhere. Do go for him*”.

Selflessly, Thomas entered the building and found Riechaelieu fully dressed, pouring liquid, which he assumed was water, through a grate in his first floor bedroom down into the shop below. The two men went down into the shop to find the source of the fire. Opening the first cellar door they saw no fire, but opening the second door where the building adjoined Cash's Boot Shop, they faced a wall of smoke and flame. Riechaelieu tried to enter but was forced back, and apparently fainted, falling backwards against Thomas, who had to carry him back upstairs, but then bravely returned to throw several buckets of water over the flames. Thomas couldn't tell what was burning, but by now the fire had taken hold so, wisely, he decided to get out. He ran from the cellar door to the front of the building, where he smashed the plate glass shop doors with his staff, while shouting to rouse any other occupants. Thomas escaped the smoke-filled building just as the Fire Brigade arrived.

² South Wales Press 4 and 11 January 1906 "Fire on New Year's Morning"; Weekly Mail 6 January 1906 "Shop Fire At Llanelly"

The blaze was quickly brought under control and was miraculously confined to one end of the cellar, preventing significant damage to the shop, the valuable stock, the upper floors and neighbouring buildings and occupants. Thomas' prompt action and brave attempt to extinguish the fire was probably responsible for it being confined in the way it was. This was clearly a close call for the Riechaelieus. Had Thomas not spotted the smoke and gained entry when he did, the ground floor and the only exit, would have quickly been ablaze and those inside would certainly have perished. Fortunately, everyone was now safe, but while some of Riechaelieu's cages and pens remained, all his livestock was lost.

As New Year's Day dawned, with the smell of smoke hanging in the air, a Sanitary Inspector instructed the removal of the animal corpses. But suspicions were already aroused. The gunshots... little attempt by those inside to escape.... Riechaelieu being up and fully dressed....pouring a liquid onto the floor below.... The Llanelly police were aware of Riechaelieu's reputation and to say the least, the situation was suspicious. Despite the Inspector's instruction, the police astutely insisted everything remain *in situ* and untouched, including the animal carcasses, until insurance assessors arrived to examine the damage. Clearly they suspected arson and that a fraudulent insurance claim would follow.

Ten days later in the calm, composed atmosphere of the Llanelly Urban District Council Roads Committee, Fire Captain Superintendent Picton Phillips presented his report³. Phillips confirmed the brigade's prompt action had prevented loss of life and saved a significant block of adjacent buildings. The cost of extinguishing the fire was £3.15s. 0d. Insurance levels he said, were £750 for the building (£90,000 today), owned by a Mr Wade, while Mr Riechaelieu's stock and fittings were insured for £3,500 (£400,000 today). The stock however was largely undamaged. The clerk for the council's roads committee was instructed to apply to the insurance companies for the Council's costs⁴.

There must have been some surprise when Phillips told them Riechaelieu had valued the livestock in his cellar at £1,500, an astonishing £175,000 today. Phillips went on to say that Riechaelieu was insured twice - for £3,500 with the Norwich Union and for a similar sum with the Scottish Union. For a man of Riechaelieu's reputation, and given the circumstances of the fire, his extremely high valuation, and double insurance, the situation was suspicious. It certainly appears that Riechaelieu intended to claim the maximum possible sum from two insurers. But there were more surprises to come when PC Thomas began his report to the Committee on what had happened that morning.

He told the assembly he could smell paraffin inside the building and that the bannister rail was wet with some liquid. He confirmed Riechaelieu told him he had been striking matches and smoking whilst in the cellar filled with straw, animal bedding and oil.

PC Thomas' testimony fell short of a direct accusation, but everything pointed to Riechaelieu being responsible for the blaze. And with apparently inflated insurance estimates for fire damage and double cover, the Committee had heard enough. They were not a Court of Law and had no jurisdiction to investigate such matters.

³ South Wales Press 11 January 1906 "The Stepney Street Fire"

⁴ Llanelly County Guardian 11 January 1906

Many questions remained. Louise had left Riechaelieu on Christmas Day ⁵, so had she returned to the family home on New Year's Eve? Why did Riechaelieu try to stop Constable Thomas entering the burning building? Why were Louise and Gladys so slow to leave a burning building or to drop keys down to PC Thomas? Who fired pistol shots, and why? What was the liquid Riechaelieu was pouring down through the grating onto the shop floor below? Why was Riechaelieu fully dressed at five o'clock in the morning on New Year's Day?

In conclusion, the Roads Committee recorded a job well done by the police and fire brigade. A suspicious fire had been quickly confined and significant damage and loss of life averted. Had the fire gone undetected for just a few minutes more, the only means of escape for those inside was a 40ft. drop from an upper storey window.

As for the pistol shots, Llanelly people knew Riechaelieu often carried a pistol which he had used to threaten unhappy customers and indeed his own family. A few years later his divorce papers included a statement from Louise of how he once fired a pistol at her, then threatened to shoot their daughter too. There is no way of knowing if the shots fired while the fire raged were directed at Constable Thomas, at Louise and Gladys, or if they had been with Riechaelieu. Perhaps Riechaelieu wanted revenge on his wife for leaving him. If Louise died, he would inherit everything. Perhaps he was planning another suicide attempt, setting both buildings on fire. Perhaps this time his suicide attempt was intended to include his wife and child too. Or perhaps he was planning a fake insurance claim.

It was a frightening start to 1906 and as the year unfolded Riechaelieu was approaching a major crisis as his state of mind reached crisis point. Such was his condition Riechaelieu would, with devastating consequences, soon turn his pistol on himself.

Riechaelieu's *annus horribilis* was about to get worse. After years of legal acrimony, the fire at his jewellery shop and bankruptcy, his business (actually Louise's) was finished. His family were gone, his inflated and suspicious insurance claims were rejected, he faced huge legal costs, and he was perhaps fortunate to escape prosecution for arson and attempted fraud. He was now a bankrupt laudanum addict who would soon be detained in a Swansea workhouse, now living alone in a hotel, without family or friend.

⁵ Evening Express 9 May 1907

CHAPTER EIGHT

Abuse, False Claims, Illness and Perjury

Within ten days of the Stepney Street fire, Riechaelieu was in court again, suing Mr J Herbert Hall for £10 (about £1,000 today), for the loss of a cavy sow ¹ at a livestock exhibition ². These minor tit-for-tat cases had become almost routine for him now.

On the morning of Saturday 17 March 1906, there was a new topic for gossip in Llanelly. Newspapers reported “...a scandalous libel and vulgar abuse directed towards a prominent townsman”, when placards appeared across the windows of Riechaelieu’s shop. By the time the offensive words were removed “...they had been read by hundreds if not thousands of people” ³. The press was tactful in not publishing the victim’s name or details of the abuse, but reported the victim was closely identified with the Urban District Council and the Harbour Trust. Furthermore, the man was “...a well known solicitor”. It seems likely that Riechaelieu was attacking one of the many solicitors who had dared challenge him in court, with his arch-enemy, Mr D R Edmunds, top of the list. Edmunds had been associated with the Harbour Trust for at least two years and was currently Chairman ⁴. The placards were scratched from the windows and there is no record of further action being taken by the victim or the police.

Events were closing in on Riechaelieu. The manner in which he lived his life was changing and his wealth, power and control were slipping away. His often corrupt business deals, his taste for confrontation, his reputation and acts of violence towards anyone who crossed him, were conspiring to make his life intolerable.

The aftermath of the Stepney Street fire was potentially lucrative for Riechaelieu and offered a one-stop solution to his financial predicament. A double-insurance payout on a fire-damaged property and inflated valuations for the loss of livestock, underlined his hope for a financial windfall.

A newspaper report on the arbitration proceedings in June 1906 ⁵ stated “....under the Umpireship of Mr Pollack.....Riechaelieu was examined and cross examined for three days. In the course of the cross examination Riechaelieu’s admissions were such as would unhinge the mental balance of any man.”

The arbitration hearing took place in Cardiff, and delivered judgement against Riechaelieu on all aspects ⁶. The insurance companies indicated that the circumstances surrounding the fire had raised such suspicions in their minds, that it was deemed advisable to have the police constantly in attendance. The arbitrators threw out Riechaelieu’s claim and he was faced with paying his own costs ⁷.

¹ The cavy is a rodent of the *Caviidae* family native to South America and is also known as the guinea pig

² South Wales Press 11 January 1906 "Claim for Lost Cavy"

³ Country Echo 22 March 1906

⁴ Weekly Mail 30 April 1904 "Llanelly and the Bank"; The Cambrian 9 November 1906 "An Official's Story"

⁵ South Wales Press 4 October 1906 "Riechaelieu's Trial"

⁶ Evening Express 13 July 1906 "Scene at an Auction"

⁷ South Wales Press 4 October 1906

The shop at 43 Stepney Street was now closed. Riechaelieu had little chance of financial recompense for the fire, and now he faced another legal bill. Louise and his child were gone, and with no control of the business assets, Riechaelieu's grasp on reality was rapidly diminishing.

Unwisely, he launched retaliatory action against the insurance company, and of course, he lost. He was instructed by the court to pay all costs of his counter action, believed to have been in the region of £600 (approximately £75,000 today). This was the last straw for Riechaelieu and his actions henceforth became life-threatening.

In the first week of July 1906, after the crushing insurance arbitration case, newspapers reported Riechaelieu as having been "...seized by a sudden illness..." and "...found acting strangely at High Street Station, Swansea"⁸. He was admitted to Swansea Workhouse Infirmary suffering from "...delusions and suicidal tendencies". Reports say he was "detained", suggesting he was held against his will. This was probably a sensible course of action for a disturbed man with suicidal tendencies who also carried a revolver.

About a week later, on Wednesday 11 July 1906 Riechaelieu returned to Llanelly, taking a room in Mr Leonard's Grand Hotel in Stepney Street. Riechaelieu had given an undertaking not to contact his wife and child. Local sympathy had long since evaporated, he had few friends, and his social interaction was limited. Now there was little left in Llanelly for him. Bankrupt, isolated, unable to do business, and now denied his anticipated insurance windfall, he became increasingly depressed and unpredictable.

Believing Riechaelieu was in Swansea Workhouse Infirmary, Louise tried to sever her business links with her increasingly erratic husband for good, with the help of friends. But Riechaelieu had been released from hospital, and was still emotionally unstable after his breakdown. What he discovered next sent him into an uncontrollable rage.

On the very day he returned to Llanelly, his wife and owner of D.IMR & Co, was quite legally disposing of the company's assets by public auction⁹. Ellis Poole Auctioneers (the same Mr Poole who assisted Louise when she left Riechaelieu on Christmas Day), had hired premises in Vaughan Street for the two-day event and on 11-12 July they began to auction "...a tremendous stock of gold and silver, shop fixtures, fittings, and Riechaelieu's pigeons, cavies, lizards and African curios". Even Riechaelieu's home-made livestock cages and pens were up for sale.

It would have been a large and lucrative sale. On the first day great crowds attended as the auction got under way. That evening to the amazement of the assembled crowd and to Louise's astonishment, Riechaelieu marched angrily into the auction room in a very animated state, causing a great commotion, shouting and protesting loudly against the sale. Aware of his state of mind, Louise was rightly alarmed at his sudden appearance and demeanour. The public too were frightened, and perhaps aware of Riechaelieu's reputation and his habit of carrying a pistol, rushed to the exit. Several women fainted in the panic, and had to be helped outside and into cabs. The

⁸ Llanelly & County Guardian and others 9 August 1906

⁹ Evening Express 13 July 1906 "Scene at an Auction"

police were called as Riechaelieu tried to commandeer proceedings, and take over the auctioneer's rostrum. The police arrived and there were scuffles as Riechaelieu was restrained. In the pushing and shoving some glass smashed to the ground, causing further panic in the crowd. Meanwhile people gathered on the street outside to see what the fuss was about. The police later reported a scene of great disorder was narrowly averted ¹⁰.

Having brought the auction to a chaotic end, Riechaelieu abruptly left. The next morning a card appeared pinned to the auction room door, declaring no goods were to be sold or taken away without Riechaelieu's written consent. The second day of auction did not take place. Riechaelieu informed newspapers that the Auction was organised without his knowledge, that it was selling *his* belongings, and he had only heard about it that very day on his return to Llanelly. Riechaelieu failed to mention that he had transferred everything to Louise to avoid the consequences of his unscrupulous business behaviour, and that legally nothing in the sale belonged to him.

Riechaelieu headed straight to Carmarthen where he swore an affidavit to the Official Receiver, confirming that the whole of the business belonged to him. For years he claimed ownership of D.IMR & Co only when it suited him. But the courts, and probably the local community too, were aware by now that this had been settled by the Interpleader ¹¹ case of 1901, *Riechaelieu versus Blankensee*, which established Louise as the rightful owner. So by obtaining an affidavit with total disregard for the law, Riechaelieu knowingly perjured himself to regain control of D.IMR & Co.'s gold and silver. In a dramatic about turn he acknowledged to the Receiver that his action now confirmed that multiple previous evidences given under oath, were perjured. ¹² Clearly Riechaelieu was now a very desperate man.

With his emotional problems ever more prominent, in early July Riechaelieu took rooms at the Grand Commercial Temperance Hotel, 64 Stepney Street. The proprietor of the hotel William Leonard described him as very poorly and said he was laid up for three days upon arrival. Riechaelieu stayed at the Grand until 8 August. Leonard described his concern that Riechaelieu had not been outside for some time, and so took him for a walk on the Bank Holiday evening of 7 August. They walked towards the Town Hall grounds and when they reached the corner by the York Hotel, Riechaelieu pointed into the distance and asked what where the lights there. Leonard told him it was the docks, but warned him not to go there. Riechaelieu replied "*...I think that would be the best way out of it*". In a later statement Leonard confirmed that he thought this comment was a reference to ending his life. ¹³

Leonard had known Riechaelieu for some time. They had discussed his business problems, and the fire at his jewellery shop. They discussed his personal problems, losing the insurance arbitration case, and the vast cost of his ill-fated counter-claim. They spoke about Louise and how following his loss of memory, he had been detained at the Swansea Workhouse Infirmary. Leonard said Riechaelieu's behaviour was different now, that he was a very troubled man and "*...was developing*

¹⁰ Evening Express 13 July 1906 "Scene at an Auction"

¹¹ An Interpleader is a civil procedure that allows a plaintiff or a defendant to initiate a lawsuit in order to compel two or more other parties to litigate a dispute. An interpleader action originates when the plaintiff holds property on behalf of another, but does not know to whom the property should be transferred.

¹² Cardiff Times 11 August 1906

¹³ Evening Express and Evening Mail 27 September 1906 "Shot in the Head"

a religious turn of mind". He spoke of an offer to travel to Australia, to be part of a new railway project. Alarming, Leonard also said Riechaelieu kept five razors in his bedroom and habitually took morphia and laudanum. When he heard Riechaelieu was bothering other hotel customers with his troubles, Leonard had had to speak to him to stop it happening again.

Clara Payne, a waitress at the Grand Commercial had befriended Riechaelieu ¹⁴. She told how he was deeply troubled by an insulting letter sent by his wife, Louise. He missed her and his daughter very much, and Payne said he took drugs nightly. These were obtained for him by Mr Stockdale who also worked at the Grand. Stockdale recalled one incident where Riechaelieu had taken his laudanum while in the hotel's Commercial Room and it took effect before he could reach his bedroom. The police were called, but after half an hour he recovered. Soon after this incident Leonard's wife, fearing for the safety of her guests, removed the razors from Riechaelieu's room.

Leonard recalled that Louise and Gladys had stayed at the hotel on the night before the stock auction. They were due to return but when they heard Riechaelieu was in residence, they never came back.

On the night of 7 August Leonard, who was aware of Riechaelieu's fragile state of mind, alerted the police that he had appeared troubled and had not returned to his rooms at the Grand. Instead, armed with a pistol, Riechaelieu had walked the short distance along Stepney Street, to the empty, fire-damaged shell of his former shop and family home at 43 Stepney Street. He broke into the deserted building and made his way to the second floor.

¹⁴ South Wales Press 7 October 1906 "Riechaelieu's Trial"

CHAPTER NINE

Riechaelieu Attempts Suicide

Notes, Medical Reports, the Revolver, the Court and the Llanelly Guardians

Just after midnight on Wednesday 8 August 1906, Riechaelieu's shop stood locked, dark and empty. It was undergoing renovation after the suspicious fire eight months earlier. It is perhaps understandable how a man under such pressure, probably enduring serious mental distress, would be drawn back to his family home, to the place where he had lived and worked for years, a place that held many happy family memories.

Around 1am Morgan Williams who lived next door, alerted the police to the sound of an intruder. Police Sergeants Jones and Thomas arrived, and at 1:45 am gained entry to the building through the cellar gratings that had been removed during renovation - the same gratings through which eight months earlier Constable Thomas had seen smoke emerging as the basement burned.

Given the police had been notified of Riechaelieu's situation, they probably suspected it was him inside the building. The policemen were making their way from the cellar to the ground floor, when suddenly they heard a gunshot. They hastened up the stairs.

On the second floor, they were confronted by a truly horrific scene. They found Riechaelieu slumped astride the open window ledge, moaning and bleeding profusely from a point-blank gunshot wound to his right temple, which had destroyed much of his face. He was conscious and in great distress.¹

The police knew Riechaelieu had lived and worked there, they knew his eccentricities and his extraordinary past, and no doubt recognised him immediately. It must have been shocking to find him so badly injured, bleeding from both eyes and nose, still conscious and groaning piteously, while balanced precariously astride a window ledge fifty feet above a concrete basement. If he fell, it would be certain death. The pistol still hung by a lanyard tethered to his wrist. There was nobody else in the building. It looked very much like suicide.



Architectural drawing Llanelly Workhouse Infirmary

¹ Evening Express 8 August 1906; Llanelly & County Guardian 9 August 1906

Jones quickly summoned Dr S J Roderick. When they placed Riechaelieu on the floor he cried, *"Oh doctor, do something for me. I am bad. It was I that did it, and there is no one to blame"*². Faced with such catastrophic injuries, Dr Roderick sent Riechaelieu immediately to the Town Hospital. The hospital could not take him because the wards were full and the male ward was being disinfected. Instead he was sent to the Union Workhouse Infirmary at Bryntirion. His condition on arrival was described as precarious, and such was the extent and severity of his injuries, he was not expected to survive.

In 1906 suicide was still a criminal offence and, unlikely as it seems today, if Riechaelieu survived, he would be charged, and would appear in court.

Sergeants Jones and Thomas recorded the evidence from the scene of the rear second floor bedroom of 43 Stepney Street. They noted how they had gained entry, that they heard the pistol shot in the darkness, and then how they had found Riechaelieu. The weapon was a six-chamber revolver. One chamber had been discharged and the other five still held live ammunition. They noticed pencil messages scribbled on the wall, and a closer look revealed them to be a long and detailed suicide note. The police instructed Mr Llewellyn, the contractor who was renovating the property, not to enter the room where Riechaelieu was found, thus preserving this handwritten evidence.

The message was coherent, but rambling, referring to Louise's recent sale of D.IMR & Co's assets. Riechaelieu wrote, *"Look at my pens and aviaries in the auction rooms. Took me months to make. Pulled down.... sold for a few coppers"*. Then referring to the woman he had so mistreated, he wrote *"...I was never angry with Lou. Tell Louie I went 'around front and back of the house, in hope of seeing Gladys - no sign and I dare not knock after I promised not to"*. He expresses his anguish that his wife had been housed by two supporters.

Then referring to his manoeuvre to give company ownership to Louise only to avoid his creditors, he writes, *"It is hard after working for 21 years for you to have everything taken by a legal trick and lose you also. I care not for the money. You, Poole [the Auctioneer], Walton and Morris know that. Poole says you would rather poison yourself and Gladys than see me again. Why Louise? If Louie would let me see my darling child.....it would not be so hard."* And then with breathtaking hypocrisy *".....I have done nothing by word, deed or thought to turn her from me like this"*.

"Oh Louie! And I have been working day and night trying to get you to love me more and our child more. How could my wife...the mother of my child do like this - you robbed me of money. In this house I and Louie and Gladys have been happy." In words that revealed his clear intention to end his life, he writes *"Mrs Morris first caused friction, now she and [blank - later identified as the Rev Roberts], and [blank - unidentified] ruined us all and drove me to my death, and even to-day we might have been happy if Louie had come to me. I have never said an unkind word about Louie although she says I have. Even all through this episode, I would never hurt the police or Louie or anyone, but myself, then only to please Lou."*

While writing his final sentence, Riechaelieu had become aware of sounds from the floors below. He suspected there was someone else in the building. His note concluded *"I think I hear Police*

² South Wales Press 4 October 1906 "Riechaelieu's Trial"

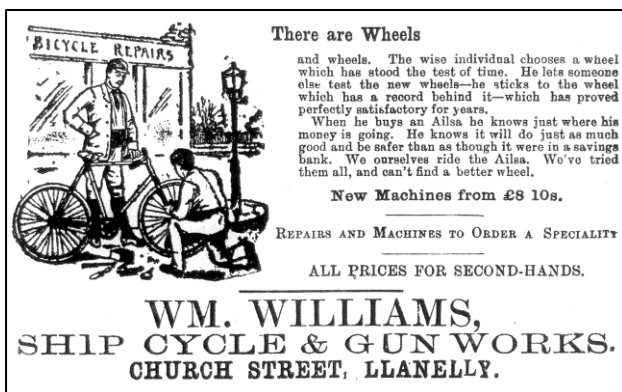
seeking me. I may be wrong for there are always queer noises in this empty house - rats I think...."³

Seconds after completing that last sentence, Riechaelieu sat astride the second floor window ledge, looking down to the concrete basement, three floors below, then gripping his pistol, he raised it to his right temple, and pulled the trigger.

Attended by Doctors Evans, Roderick and Brook at the Workhouse Infirmary, the fading Riechaelieu was heard to say *"I tried to kill myself....I know I am going to die..."* After a few hours he lapsed into unconsciousness. His wife came to the hospital that evening and spent some time with him. First press reports described his condition as too precarious and weak to undergo an operation to locate the bullet - let alone extract it. The bullet had entered his right temple, totally destroying his right eye socket, the right eye and optic nerve. It had travelled on through his nasal cavity, coming to rest lodged behind the stem of his left eye, partially destroying that also. Later, Dr Roderick described the injury as extending up into the brain for about two inches, where he could feel a hard substance, which was attributed to part of the skull which was carried by the bullet ⁴.

That night Mr Roberts, a Wesleyan Minister was called to keep vigil at Riechaelieu's bedside.

Llanelly gossip was in overdrive at this sensational news and just about every journal covered the story. The town was expecting the announcement at any moment that Riechaelieu, for years the man they loved to hate, was finally dead. They waited. Hours passed. Then days. But the announcement never came. Horrific though his injuries were, they did not prove fatal. Against the odds Riechaelieu began to recover. He was left facially disfigured, his right eye completely gone, less than 10% vision remaining in his left, and his nose destroyed. The bullet would remain forever lodged inside his head, behind the stem of his left eye.



*Williams Cycle and Gun Works.
South Wales Press 04 Oct. 1906*

Throughout his life Riechaelieu had often kept a pistol, and had made sure people knew about it. But on the morning of the shooting he had not had access to one. The revolver he used had been obtained that very afternoon from Mr Williams of the Ships Cycle Works on Church Street ⁵. Williams knew Riechaelieu and his *"....rather peculiar"* ways. Riechaelieu had called on Williams that morning, asking to buy a revolver. Initially Williams declined to supply a weapon and Riechaelieu had left. But he returned several times that day and on his final

visit, had spun a long and convincing story of why he needed the weapon. He explained that he now had no reason to remain in Llanelli and had joined a syndicate travelling to Australia, which was sailing the very next day. He spun a story about a railway investment scheme, and went as far as giving the name of the ship on which he would sail. Williams described him as rational, calm, happy to chat about his journey and future prospects. He was convincing and Williams was

³ Llanelly & County Guardian 9 August 1906 "Llanelly Sensation"

⁴ South Wales Press 4 October 1906 "Riechaelieu's Trial"

⁵ South Wales Press 4 October 1906 "Riechaelieu's Trial"

persuaded. Around 5 pm Williams opened his workshop and began repairing a revolver which he then sold to Riechaelieu, together with half a box of cartridges. He made Riechaelieu sign a declaration form. Of course Riechaelieu had fed Williams a pack of very convincing lies.

Just six weeks after shooting himself in the head, on 27 September 1906 Riechaelieu first appeared at the Police Court facing a charge of *felo de se*⁶, or attempted suicide. At the time the law took the view that all human life was sacred and no man had the right to do what he liked with it. With ghoulish relish, newspapers reported every detail of Riechaelieu's hideously pathetic court appearance. Clearly he still sold newspapers and without exception newspapers reported his pathetic, broken appearance, his bandaged head, and that because he was now almost blind he had to be helped into the dock. Such was his frailty, a police officer was instructed to sit alongside him, lest he should topple over.

Much evidence was heard about the risk Riechaelieu had posed to the general public amidst '*sensationalist reports that appeared in the newspapers at the time, when no end of wild rumours went about as to what would have happened if Riechaelieu had met others*'⁷. Edmunds, Riechaelieu's opponent in so many court battles, explained that part of the suicide note was of great importance as not only did it appear to be the last thing Riechaelieu wrote before pulling the trigger, it also acknowledged Riechaelieu had apparently heard the rumours that it was his intention to take the lives of others. Magnanimously, Edmunds pointed out Riechaelieu had emphatically written it was never his intention to do injury to anyone but himself. Considering their history, this was a gracious act on Edmunds' part.

As the hearing concluded, Riechaelieu, in a pathetic plea, asked the bench "*May I ask for bail, sir? My wife will look after me. I assure you there is not the slightest reason why I should not be allowed bail. I might then be able to recover my strength*". The bench was apologetic. "*We are very sorry but we will be unable to grant your request. You will be taken care of*". The court explained that responsibility did not rest with them to discharge Riechaelieu and that he was to remain in custody and would be committed for trial at the Quarter Sessions on 19th October. Riechaelieu must have appeared a tragic figure, as he broke down and cried as he was helped from the dock.

By today's standards it is shocking that a man in such a poor physical and emotional state should suffer the rigours of not one, but two court appearances. Riechaelieu had been in custody for four weeks before his second appearance at the Quarter Sessions on 27 October, where in a brief hearing the court found him guilty. Riechaelieu asked for a chance to regain his sight at a nursing home, and friends afterwards would take care of him in Australia. (This appears to be a reference to the story he told Mr Williams in order to obtain the revolver. The story of an Australian railway project is unsubstantiated.) He was bound over for six months and "*...discharged on the grounds that he was not responsible for what he did.*"⁸. Riechaelieu assured the bench they would not regret the course they had chosen. He was free again.

Riechaelieu had avoided another custodial sentence, but his life was in ruins. The Stepney Street fire six months earlier had wiped out D.IMR & Co as a trading entity. As the legal owner, Louise,

⁶ *Felo de se*: archaic legal term meaning suicide, derived from Latin: felon of himself

⁷ South Wales Press 4 October 1906 "Richaelieu's Trial"

⁸ South Wales Press 4 October 1906 "Richaelieu's Trial"

with her supporters, had taken possession of the remaining stock - something that had antagonised Riechaelieu greatly. His frequently-used defence in court that he did not own the business, had caught up with him. He really did not own the company, and the rightful owner, Louise, with the support of friends, was flexing her muscles. Riechaelieu clearly believed the company assets still belonged to him but the legal precedent had been established - Louise was the legal owner of D.IMR & Co and all its assets, and was perfectly entitled to dispose of them however she wished. Now permanently separated from Louise, Riechaelieu's control over his long-suffering wife was over.

In January 1907, three months after Riechaelieu's trial, the Llanelly Board of Guardians⁹ had on their agenda the cost of the medical fees incurred following his suicide attempt. They received a report on the incident, and the Clerk tabled a letter from the County Council requesting reimbursement of £1 11s. 6d. The Clerk had already repudiated the claim on behalf of the Guardians who had clearly had enough of Riechaelieu and wanted no more to do with him. They did not see his medical expenses as their responsibility and as the Council had not responded to the Clerk's rejection letter, the Guardians washed their hands of the matter.

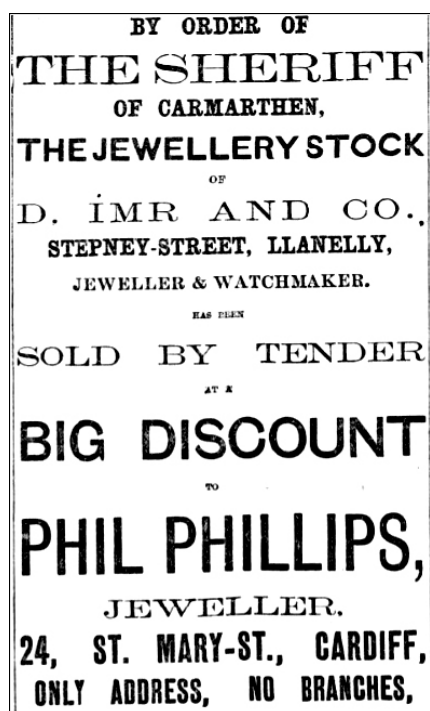
For most people, surviving such catastrophic injuries and escaping the legal consequences, would perhaps have prompted a reappraisal, a new way of living, setting new standards, and turning over a new leaf. Riechaelieu however was not like ordinary men. Now living with terrible disabilities, it might have been expected that his shenanigans would end, but not so. Within a year, disabled though he was, and his taste for confrontation undiminished, he took on three more court battles in just three months.

⁹ The Llanelly Board of Guardians, formed under the Poor Law Amendment Act 1834, were elected by local landowners and ratepayers and held responsibility for administration of the Poor Law and for running the Union Workhouse.

CHAPTER TEN

Larceny, Divorce, Assault and Another Divorce

On 27 October, 1906 Riechaelieu was released by the courts after being found guilty at his trial for attempted suicide. He had spent weeks in hospital, then time on remand. Only eight weeks after firing a bullet into his head, he would certainly have still been in very poor health.



Phillips Jewellers, Cardiff. Sale of D.IMR Assets. Evening Express 3 November 1906

Meanwhile Louise had clearly been well advised, and had quickly taken advantage of her situation. While Riechaelieu had been incapacitated, she had sold the entire D.IMR & Co stock by tender, to another jeweller, in Cardiff. In November 1906 Mr Phil Phillips advertised a large sale of D.IMR & Co.'s stock at big discounts, at his jewellery shop at 25 St Mary's Street.

Not only were the goods being sold by a third party, they were also being sold fifty miles away. Furthermore, even if he were able, Riechaelieu could not have disrupted the sale by tender to Phillips.¹

Six months later, in May 1907, just nine months after he shot himself, Riechaelieu's taste for a fight was undiminished. He launched proceedings jointly against William Morris and his wife Louise, over the ownership of the D.IMR & Co assets - a quite ludicrous action, given that the legal precedent of

ownership was already long established in Louise's favour, and the stock had already been sold to a jeweller in Cardiff.

Riechaelieu had dreamed up a new angle of attack, probably motivated by his financial desperation and his irrational need for revenge. He claimed that in his absence, Louise and Morris had entered his house illegally, smashed his furniture, forced open cupboards and drawers, and removed items belonging to him. It was to be another traumatic courtroom experience for Riechaelieu attempting to reclaim the fading remnants of his once powerful business empire. But his name was such that there were few lawyers left in Llanelly who did not know his history and his reputation for falsehood and lies who with a little preparation, could simply crush him.

In court the aggressive Riechaelieu of old reappeared. His counsel was Mr Howell, but defending Louise and Morris against the felony charge was Mr Payne, another of Riechaelieu's old adversaries. Payne's opening manoeuvre was the same as that used by Riechaelieu's arch-enemy Edmunds in the Great Watch Case. Howell began by branding him a dangerous villain, and asked the court to search him for a revolver, warning "...their *Worships* are aware he had attempted to

¹ Cardiff Evening Express & Evening Mail 3 November 1906 "By Order of the Sheriff..."

take his own life and had also shot at Mrs Riechaelieu". In no mood for niceties Riechaelieu stood up and shouted at Payne, quite ridiculously calling him a liar. Riechaelieu's counsel told him to sit down and shut up. Riechaelieu was back!

Giving evidence, Riechaelieu said he was a jeweller and breeder of pet stock. His wife, the female defendant, left him for the last time on Christmas Day. They had not been living together since July last. He claimed all the goods stolen belonged to him.

The case rested on the claim that Morris and Louise Riechaelieu had illegally entered his house, forced open cupboards and destroyed furniture, and taken away goods that did not belong to them. Morris and Louise countered that Riechaelieu had smashed up his own furniture, and instructed his housekeeper to lie to the police that Morris was responsible for the damage. During cross examination Riechaelieu was characteristically rude and aggressive towards his prosecutor. As the case proceeded, the exchanges became increasingly acrimonious, Riechaelieu repeatedly refused to answer questions about his bankruptcy and at one point called the prosecution counsel a liar. The bench repeatedly threatened to take proceedings against Riechaelieu if he did not comply. Riechaelieu's usual dodges and tricks were useless now, and the prosecution was able to ask point blank questions he could no longer side-step.

Payne first established that Riechaelieu was an undischarged bankrupt, who had clearly stated he owned no assets. If that were true, there could be no assets to steal. Payne asked him if he had sworn a statement to the official receiver to this effect. It was quite ludicrous to deny this, but Riechaelieu's response was to claim privilege that he was not bound to answer. But Payne had Riechaelieu's sworn bankruptcy statement and holding it aloft to the court, asked Riechaelieu if it bore his signature. Riechaelieu of course, claimed he couldn't see it. Undeterred, Payne explained the statement stated 'No assets'. Riechaelieu went on the attack, claiming Payne had accessed papers stolen from his house. The court warned Riechaelieu again that any further rash statements would lead to contempt proceedings against him. Riechaelieu's response was to shout at the presiding magistrate "*He [Payne] has been hurling insinuations at me all day!*" then pointing across the court at his wife, shouted "*I have done everything for that girl and she goes to your sort to rogue her!*". Riechaelieu was again instructed to desist.

As the cross examination was concluding, Payne read aloud a letter from Riechaelieu to his wife, in which he acknowledged all assets belonged to her. Riechaelieu was furious by the way the evidence was presented. He shouted, "*You are a blooming cad to read that letter in open court when it could have been handed to the bench*". He was reminded by the bench that he was bringing a case of felony against his wife and was again told to shut up. He had probably realised by now that, the case was lost. He broke down and cried.

In concluding, Payne asked if Riechaelieu was ever convicted at Norwich. Riechaelieu denied this, complaining 'vehemently' about Payne's questioning. *'If you say something of that kind again I will knock you down. It is a XXXX lie'*. His aggressive response to Payne was a straightforward lie. He had received a prison sentence in Norwich in 1888 for Larceny, stealing pigeons from an

agricultural show.² Again the bench instructed him to moderate his language, to which Riechaelieu snapped, “*Go and hang yourself!*”³.

In cross examination, Riechaelieu’s housekeeper and nurse, Lizzie Dinah Williams said she was too scared of him to give evidence, so the court offered to have him removed. Williams said, “*It was Mr Riechaelieu who smashed them with a walking stick*”. She continued, “*He told me to say that it was the men who came to the house who broke the furniture*”.

With the case collapsing around him, Riechaelieu tried another pointless approach, sullyng his wife’s character, claiming Louise had ‘...*gone to another man*’, implying Morris. But he was truly clutching at straws now. This was about larceny, not adultery, and the court had heard enough. The case was lost. Morris and Louise were discharged. There is no record of costs or damages for the case. Louise and Morris eventually became business partners, and between 1908-10 they ran a fruiterer’s business at 110 Station Road.

Riechaelieu had recently sustained serious injury while cycling past the Town Hall on his bicycle.⁴ That a man with only 10% vision in one eye would risk riding a bicycle is surprising, but perhaps unsurprisingly he collided with a cart.

Lizzie Dinah Williams, the same woman who had recently given crucial evidence against him in the Louise/Morris larceny trial, had for some time been in an adulterous relationship with him under the guise of being his nurse and housekeeper. Lizzie’s husband had become aware, and he intended to confront Riechaelieu, but while this fight was developing, Riechaelieu’s wife Louise had gone to the divorce court.

Louise filed for divorce on 5 June 1907, ten months after Riechaelieu shot himself in the head. The grounds were “*adultery coupled with cruelty towards the petitioner*”.

Louise’s divorce petition⁵ laid bare the shocking extent of her husband’s cruelty and brutality. The seven page document is a detailed list of serious incidents, assaults, murderous threats and suicide attempts. Louise gives more than twenty five examples (no doubt there were more) of Riechaelieu’s brutal behaviour, any one of which would strike terror into a woman fearful for her own and her daughter’s lives.

The Petition begins with Riechaelieu’s attempted suicide in her presence, and tells how he had shown great unkindness towards her, and then made attempts to murder her. While in Hull, he had frequently struck and assaulted her with his fists, driven her out of the house and into the street, and once he had whipped her all over her body. After his arrest for assault, he attempted suicide in the Solicitor’s Rooms at Hull County Court, by drinking the contents of a laudanum bottle. Also in Hull, in Day Street he fired two shots at Louise for which he was arrested and convicted⁶. In

² Norfolk News 10 November 1888 "Alleged Theft of Pigeons from Norwich Bird Show; City of Norwich Return of Persons Committed or Bailed to appear for trial ... 22 November 1888

³ Evening Express 9 May 1907 "Trying to Trap - Lively Scenes at Llanelly"

⁴ South Wales Press 18 July 1907 "Accident to Mr. Riechaelieu"

⁵ The High Court of Justice, Court Minutes, Riechaelieu L. *versus* Riechaelieu I.M. Petition filed 5 June 1907

⁶ Hull Daily Mail 1 July 1891 "Alleged Shocking Case of Brutality in Hull"; Evening Express 16 January 1908 "Cruel Husband"

another incident he punched Louise so hard he knocked her from her chair to the floor, and then wielding his pistol, threatened to shoot her and daughter.

At 45 Coldstream Street, Llanelly, Riechaelieu attacked Louise and attempted to throw her down a flight of stairs, then again attempted suicide by taking poison. In December 1906 again at Coldstream Street, Riechaelieu had threatened to murder his wife and child. He seriously assaulted her while at the premises of William Morris at Dafen, grabbing her around the waist and arms and dragging her out into the street. He many times called her a prostitute and used other filthy and abusive language towards her.

Louise states in a measured, resigned and rather matter of fact way, how in 1906 Riechaelieu had shot himself in the head. Then in 1907 Riechaelieu applied to the King's Bench Division of the High Courts of Justice seeking a writ of *Habeas Corpus ad Subjiciendum*, challenging Louise's right to custody of Gladys. That same year, when Louise had abandoned Llanelly and returned to Hull, Riechaelieu arrived at her Hull residence with another man, who claimed to be a Detective Officer. The pair threatened Louise with arrest, causing her great anxiety. The Petition continues with Louise giving instances where Riechaelieu had regularly committed adultery with Lizzie Dinah Williams at 45 Coldstream Street where "... *they lived together as if man and wife and habitually committed adultery*". Riechaelieu's last known address appears as 62 High Street, Llanelly.

Further testimony was received from Police Constable David Henshaw who confirmed he knew the respondent, who had since been in the company of an immoral woman, and had also lived with another woman after his wife had left.

Louise's petition for divorce is the most shocking of documents. Seven pages of sworn, measured statement, a stream of sickening brutality covering more than a decade. It was delivered at the divorce court hearing on 19 July 1907. One can imagine a shocked silence as the uncontested *affidavit* was read. It says much about the shameful and cowardly bully that Riechaelieu was, that he did not contest Louise's statement, attend the proceedings, or respond in any way.

A Decree Nisi was granted on 16 January 1908 and the Decree Absolute followed six months later on 27 July 1908. After twelve years of vicious abuse, Louise was at last free from the wretched Riechaelieu.

Things were moving quickly now. It was just eight months since a frail Riechaelieu had stood pathetically in the dock, with his head bandaged, facing an attempted suicide charge. Since then he had brought the larceny case against Morris and Louise, had had a serious bicycle accident, Louise had begun divorce proceedings against him, and now his mistress's husband was on the warpath.

On Wednesday 19 June 1907, Riechaelieu was plaintiff in court, having brought assault charges against Dr David Herbert Williams, husband of Lizzie Dinah Williams with whom Riechaelieu had been living.

According to Mr Williams' subsequent divorce petition⁷. Lizzie Williams was often drunk and violent. He claimed she had been resident at Riechaelieu's house at 45 Coldstream Street since January 1907 where, under the pretext of being his housekeeper and nurse, "*...they had lived together as man and wife*". The same adulterous claim as appeared in Louise's divorce petition.⁸

When Dr David Herbert Williams arrived at Riechaelieu's house at 62 High Street on 16 July 1907, his wife Lizzie was already there. Lizzie told Riechaelieu her husband wanted to see him and Riechaelieu calmly told her to invite him in, and ask him to sit down. But Riechaelieu claimed Williams walked straight into his bedroom, with malicious intent. The newspapers reported, "*[Williams] said he had expected to see some sort of man, and not a b..... wreck, a one-eyed b..... whom he could manage nicely*". Riechaelieu claimed Williams knocked him back onto the bed, then threatened to murder him. Riechaelieu was asked if he was afraid of the defendant. "*Yes*", he replied. Was he in bodily fear of the defendant? "*Yes*". Are you afraid for your life? "*After his conduct, yes I am*". Dr Williams countered that Riechaelieu had referred to his wife as '*Dear*' in his presence, and then thrown a plate at him.

Riechaelieu was questioned on his relationship with Lizzie. The defending counsel asked Riechaelieu if he remembered Constable Henshaw being in his house in Coldstream Street on 8 March, when at 1.15 am he saw Riechaelieu in the bedroom with Lizzie. It is not explained why the policeman should be at Riechaelieu's house at this time of night, but the policeman had reported the encounter. Riechaelieu was asked "*was [Lizzie] not before the mirror doing something to her hair, and did she not only have her corset on?*" Riechaelieu denied everything. It is perhaps a reflection of the Victorian morals of the day that a policeman seeing the couple in a partially-clad, adulterous embrace, felt it appropriate to file a report, which would be recorded and later read in open court.

Pursuing a line of questioning to show a close relationship between Riechaelieu and his 'nurse' Lizzie Williams, Riechaelieu was asked if he recalled an occasion he attended the Police Station when Lizzie had been taken-up for drunkenness. He confirmed he did, and that he had offered to bail her. Then he was asked if Nurse Williams had said in his presence, that she was pregnant by him? Riechaelieu was outraged and exclaimed, "*How dare you!*" The questioning continued. "Did you hear Mrs Williams say, "*Come here Riechaelieu I believe I have a little baby for you.*" Riechaelieu replied, "*I didn't hear anything of the kind and in any case she was mad drunk.*"

The case was adjourned, but on recommencement, in a crucial development, Riechaelieu failed to appear. No reason had been given and there was considerable legal discussion on what procedure to follow. The magistrate eventually concluded that he could not convict on uncorroborated evidence. The assault case against Dr Williams was dismissed.

Almost immediately, Dr David Williams began divorce proceedings against his wife Lizzie, naming Riechaelieu as co-respondent. The reasons stated in Dr Williams' petition were Lizzie's adultery with Riechaelieu, her habitual drunkenness and her violence towards her husband. She had attacked

⁷ High Court of Justice, Court Minutes, Williams D.H. versus Williams E. and Riechaelieu I.M. Petition filed 15 March 1908

⁸ Evening Express 25 July 1907 "Mr. Riechaelieu again"; Weekly Mail 27 July 1907 "Mr. Riechaelieu Again"; South Wales Press 19 September 1907 "Assault on Riechaelieu"

him with a carving knife and cut open his head with a piece of coal.⁹ The couple had separated a year earlier, with Dr Williams taking custody of their child, and in return paying Lizzie twelve shillings a week “*..for her maintenance, so long as she remained chaste*”. The divorce was uncontested and on 16 June 1908 Dr Williams was granted a Decree Nisi, with the Decree Absolute following on 11 Jan 1909. A specific request in Dr Williams’ petition, was “*...that the said Irdan Miguel Riechaelieu may be condemned in the costs of these proceedings*”.

But what of Riechaelieu and Lizzie Williams? Why had he not attended to conclude his action against Dr Williams? Perhaps he already realised the inevitable outcome. But there is evidence of something more sinister. Something dramatic happened to the couple around the time of the trial. By the time Lizzie’s divorce was under way, she was an inmate of the Merthyr Tydfil Workhouse, while Riechaelieu’s absence from the assault trial was explained by his admittance to an asylum in his former home town of Hull.¹⁰ The circumstances of his incarceration are unclear, but after a string of court defeats he may have suffered another breakdown, and given his reputation, may have been detained for his own safety. Meanwhile if Lizzie Williams was indeed pregnant with Riechaelieu’s illegitimate child, with nowhere to go and now disowned by her husband, she may well have faced admission to the Workhouse.

After six months, Hull wanted rid of Riechaelieu, and asked the Llanelly Guardians to take him back. Initially the Guardians¹¹ and several other Hull Workhouses refused to take him.¹² But surprisingly, some Llanelly folks spoke up for him, claiming he now lived an industrious life. In March 1910 he was accepted back in the town and with surprising generosity the Guardians granted four shillings per week allowance.¹³ Ever one to take advantage, within six months Riechaelieu was asking that his aid be increased, and that the Guardians pay for specialist surgery to have his eye stump removed and a false eye fitted. The Guardians declined, and advised him that he could receive whatever treatment was available in the Infirmary.¹⁴

For the next few years Riechaelieu was uncharacteristically subdued. In the 1911 census, Irdan Miguel Riechaelieu appears as a lodger at 2 Portland Street, Mumbles, Oystermouth. Assuming this is the same person, he claims to be 39 when he was actually nearer 55.

By 1913 he was back in Llanelly, where he met and married the luckless young woman, Jesse Watkeys.

⁹ Evening Express 16 June 1908 "Husband Obtains a Divorce"

¹⁰ Llanelly Mercury and South Wales Advertiser 25 March 1909 "Riechaelieu Convalescent"

¹¹ Llanelly Mercury and South Wales Advertiser 21 October 1909 "Riechaelieu Again"

¹² Llanelly Mercury and South Wales Advertiser 4 November 1909 "Ex-Llanelly Jeweller"

¹³ Llanelly Star 5 March 1910 "Relief for Riechaelieu"

¹⁴ Llanelly Mercury and South Wales Advertiser 3 November 1910 "Riechaelieu's Eyesight"

CHAPTER ELEVEN

His Final Days

On 3 May 1913 at Llanelly Register Office, Riechaelieu married again, in what was, by any standard, a surprising liaison. His new wife was Caroline Jesse Watkeys, a pretty, twenty-six-year old from a well-off colliery owning family of some repute. Her uncle, George Watkeys, was Llanelly's highly regarded Borough Surveyor, under whose watch the town had experienced what could rightly be regarded as a golden age of building including the Market Pavilion, the new Town Hall, Castle Buildings, the YMCA, and the elegant Arcade in Stepney Street.



1924 George Watkeys,
Borough Surveyor,
1879-1929. ILL3810

It is a great mystery, therefore, why an eminently attractive and well-connected young woman would marry such a man as the aggressive and violent Riechaelieu, who was around thirty years her senior, seriously facially disfigured and almost blind from his attempted suicide. It was to be a disastrous decision on her part.

In fact, it didn't take long for her to find this out. Within a month of the marriage she and her husband were in Llanelly

Magistrates Court charged respectively with theft and

receiving stolen goods – one book, five knives, eight forks, and other articles which were collectively valued at two pounds, three shillings

and sixpence - all from the Thomas Arms Hotel ¹. That Riechaelieu was charged with receiving the goods suggests that they were found in his possession, and that he must have pleaded ignorance of the theft and consequently passed the blame on to his wife. In the event, therefore, she was convicted and he was acquitted. ² What the court case also revealed was the extraordinary fact that this newly-wed couple were living separately in two different houses in Llanelly: she in Great Western Terrace and he at 123 Old Castle Road. It was an unusual marriage, to say the least.



Caroline 'Jesse' Watkeys aged 20-
25yrs, wearing MizPah brooch.

¹ South Wales Press 25 May 1915

² Cambrian Daily Leader 12 June 1913 "Stealing and Receiving; Carmarthen Weekly Reporter 11 July 1913 "Discharged"; *"Secret Sins - Sex, Violence and Society in Carmarthenshire 1870-1920"* Russell Davies, ISBN 0-7083-1367-1 University of Wales Press 1996

Following the court case, they did not stay long in Llanelly. The next year, 1914, they went to live in Bournemouth. The move away from the town is not surprising because the court case had been reported in the local newspapers, and the couple would undoubtedly have been the subject of a great deal of local gossip. In a town like Llanelly, where people were friendly and familiar with each other, Riechaelieu's reputation would have been well known, and it would be surprising if there had not been a lot of talk as to why the pretty and well-connected young Jesse had married such a man. Moreover, as a businessman, Riechaelieu was finished. Nobody with any sense would have done business with him and, in any case, with his horrific injuries and limited eyesight, watch-making and jewellery selling could no longer be a viable occupation.

So at Bournemouth they entered upon a completely different lifestyle by taking 'below-stairs' employment in the household of a Dr Ramsey ³, where Riechaelieu took on the role of butler, and Jesse became a maid. It was a dramatic fall in status for both of them, and cannot have been easy. For Riechaelieu it was a long way away from the days when, in the heart of Llanelly's shopping centre, he had run a fashionable Stepney Street jewellery business with his own servants, and Jesse must have considered the comfort of her upbringing a different world. The only thing that stayed the same was that they continued to live separately, with Riechaelieu living in Dr Ramsey's house, and Jesse taking nearby lodgings.

It did not last long. In May 1915, Jesse returned to her family home in Llanelly, ⁴ claiming that she had been ill-treated by her husband, which included being threatened with a razor. Riechaelieu, however, claimed his wife had absconded with his money and possessions, which amounted to £150 (about £15,000 in today's money). As such, Jesse was arrested at her family home in Gilbert Place, and then detained at Llanelly Police Station ⁵. Eventually, she was taken back to Bournemouth where she was held on remand to appear in court on a charge of larceny.

At the subsequent court hearing Jesse put up a feisty defence, and is recorded as shouting across the court that Riechaelieu had threatened her with a razor, and that he should be struck down for his lies. In the event the court believed Jesse's story and dismissed all the charges against her. However, she was looking for more than that and, while the verdict was being delivered, she asked for a summons and a separation order from his persistent cruelty. The court must have felt great sympathy for her because, astonishingly, it was agreed to hear her case the very next day, the court realising the great distance she would need to travel to and from Llanelly.

For Riechaelieu this was truly the end. Even if Jesse knew nothing about the former claims of marital brutality against him, these were bound to come out in the subsequent enquiry. His life had been based around a series of lies and he knew it. He had lost the case against Jesse and he could no longer control her. He was disfigured, and had only ten-per-cent vision in one eye. On the next day his history of brutality would be exposed for all to see, and he would be left with no wife, no money, and just a subservient role as a butler which, if his past was exposed, may well be terminated. His world had collapsed.

³ Dr Frank Winston Ramsey was a highly acclaimed medical practitioner, appointed Honorary Surgeon at the Victoria Hospital, Poole. He was a Fellow of the Royal Society of Medicine, and on his death in April 1935 was President Elect of the British Medical Association. Ramsey lived in Jesmond Dene, a large house in Bournemouth, now a hotel.

⁴ South Wales Press 19 May 1915 "Mrs. Riechaelieu Arrested"; Bournemouth Daily Echo 18 May 1915 "Remanded"

⁵ Llanelly Argus 22 May 1915; Llanelly & County Guardian 20 May 1915; South Wales Press 19 May 1915

That night, 10 May 1915, alone and brooding on what the next day would bring, his life began to unravel. At 10.30 p.m. he asked his employer, Dr Ramsey, for something to help him sleep, and was given veronal, a sedative and a common treatment for insomnia. Riechaelieu, however, also had laudanum and started to take it. As the cocktail of drugs took their deadly hold on him, he wrote a series of three suicide notes in which he portrayed himself as an honourable husband, who loved his wife and was only taking this action to end his life so that his wife would no longer need to tell lies about him, and he could also avoid revealing her sins. Before 11 pm he had written the first of the notes, which contained the statements, *'Can't live without Jessie, Jessie my wife. My heart's love. Good-bye to my lost wife. To free Jessie and please her, one dose, the lot for my darling's sake.'* At 11 pm a second note had a more denunciatory tone including, *'Finished, robbed, slandered, deserted by my darling [...] Jessie has no thought of my agony. She is happy tonight, I die alone [...] I must die, for tomorrow by her act I should be compelled to tell the world of her sins.'* At 11.20 pm he wrote his final note which read, *'Horrible language for Jessie, but have saved her from telling more lies. How pleased she and her father and brother will be to find me dead.'*

The next morning, his body was found by Dr Ramsay who went to see why his butler had not come down from his room. It was concluded that he had been dead for some hours. His desperate suicide notes were wrapped around the empty laudanum bottle.⁶

Riechaelieu's death was widely reported in many newspapers in Bournemouth and in Llanelly, over many days, and in some cases weeks. The number of column inches devoted to his demise is astonishing, and brought forth many long, detailed accounts of his life.

⁶ Bournemouth Daily Echo 18, 21, 22 May 1915; Bournemouth Guardian 29 May 1915; Llanelly Mercury 27 May & 3 June 1915; South Wales Press 26 May 1915; Llanelly & County Guardian 27 May 1915; Bournemouth Visitors Directory 22, 29 May 1915

POSTSCRIPT

The Riechaelieu story was almost over, but not quite. There was one final surprise in store which had a profound effect on Jesse's family.

Louise Riechaelieu (1866-1945)

In 1919 at the age of fifty-three, eleven years after her divorce and six years after Riechaelieu's suicide, Louise emigrated from Glasgow to California. She petitioned for US citizenship, and appears on the 1932 Los Angeles Voters Register ¹ as resident at 111 N. Thomas Street, Lincoln Heights - a prestigious, upmarket area. She became a baker. Four years later she appears in the 1936 Register, alongside her daughter Gladys, at University Park - another affluent location. Louise died in 1945 aged seventy-nine and is buried at Forest Lawn Memorial Park, Glendale, California.

Gladys Madeleine Riechaelieu (1893-1976)

It is unclear if Louise's only surviving child accompanied her to California in 1919, or if she followed later. However she appears in the 1936 Voters Register, living with her mother at 3909½ S. Broadway Street in California. ² Gladys Madeleine died in 1976 aged eighty-three and is also buried in Glendale, California.



Grave of Madeleine 'Gladys' Riechaelieu. Forest Lawns Memorial Park. Glendale California.



Within months of Riechaelieu's death, Jesse met the author's grandfather, George Pritchard, with whom she had four daughters. The youngest was the author's mother, Barbara. Jesse died in 1959, aged 72 and is buried in Willesden New Cemetery, London.

¹ USA Petition for Citizenship no. 34042 Intention no. 49652 14 May 1931

² Sixteenth Census of the United States 1940, Los Angeles, California SD 15 ED 60-539 Sheet 38

The children of Jesse and Irdan Miguel Riechaelieu: Elsie Riechaelieu (dates unknown)

Jesse and Riechaelieu's first child was Elsie. That name has been passed down the family for a hundred years, and Barbara, Jesse's last born, recalls her mother's description of Elsie, her first born. Assuming Elsie was not illegitimate, she could only have been born between her parents' marriage and Riechaelieu's death (1913-15). However there is no record of her birth or death. Perhaps she died very young or, if she was born illegitimately, Jesse may have been pressured to give up the child for adoption. One could well imagine the chagrin of the prestigious Watkeys family if they had found that the young, unmarried Jesse, had fallen pregnant. Perhaps an illegitimate pregnancy was the reason for the pretty, young Jesse marrying the elderly, disfigured Riechaelieu in the first place. In her second marriage Jessie named her first daughter Elsie.

Robert Leslie Riechaelieu 1917-1917

There is a final twist to the story in the revelation of a secret that Jesse took to her grave, and which came to light a hundred years later. It concerns Jesse and Riechaelieu's second child, Robert Leslie Riechaelieu.

Robert was born in January 1917³. His birth certificate records Jesse as his mother and Irdan Miguel Riechaelieu as his father. But Riechaelieu's death certificate confirms that he had died fifteen months previously. Immediately, three things become apparent: Riechaelieu was not Robert's father; Jesse was an unmarried widow when Robert was born; and Robert's birth certificate was intentionally fraudulent.

It appears that at the registration of the birth Jesse perpetrated a subtle deception. At that time a father's name appeared on a birth certificate only if he was present at the registration. But in this case with Riechaelieu already deceased, it would appear that Jesse somehow convinced an official that Riechaelieu had only recently passed away, and his status as deceased father was accepted. It also suggests that Riechaelieu's deceased status was accepted without sight of his death certificate, which would immediately confirm he could not possibly be the child's father. But if Riechaelieu wasn't the boy's father - who was? It seems likely that Robert's real father, was the author's grandfather, George Pritchard.

At the time, the UK's bastardy laws were some of the harshest in Europe and an illegitimate child was considered parentless at law, and even the parents' subsequent marriage could not legitimise their child⁴. Such was the stigma borne by 'bastards', that faking Robert's parental identity was probably a risk worth taking.

There is another powerful reason to suggest George Pritchard was the child's father. Robert died just before Christmas, on 18 December 1917, aged just eleven months⁵. Three weeks later, Jesse and George were married⁶. Taking into account the Christmas and New Year period, it is clear

³ Birth Certificate BXCC586541 West Tottenham, Edmonton

⁴ The Black Lamb of the Black Sheep: Illegitimacy in the English Working Class, 1850-1939, Samford University, Alabama, USA

⁵ Death Certificate DYB584577 17 December 1917 Hampstead, London

⁶ Marriage Certificate A74620 Willesden, Middlesex 15 January 1918

they married as quickly as possible after Robert's death. And so it was that in 2005, Barbara and her three sisters learned that ninety years earlier, it was quite likely, indeed probable, that they had had a baby brother named Robert.

Irdan Miguel Riechaelieu, 1856-1915

When Riechaelieu was born is anybody's guess, but he died on 21 May 1915. The death certificate shows the cause of death as "*Poisoning by Laudanum following a normal dose of Veronal. Suicide whilst of unsound mind*"⁷.

Twelfth January 1917 110. Seafood Road Tottenham U.D.	Robert Leslie	Boy	Irdan Miguel Riechaelieu	Baroline Jessie Riechaelieu formerly Watkeys	Butler (Domestic) (deceased)	G. J. Riechaelieu Mother 110 Seafood Road Tottenham
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Robert Riechaelieu Birth Certificate BXCC586541

Found dead Twenty first May 1915 Geomond Lane Braidley Road Bournemouth U.D.	Irdan Miguel Riechaelieu	male	59 years	Butler	Poisoning by laudanum following a normal dose of Veronal Suicide whilst of unsound mind	Certificate received from J. S. Leppert A. H. Thompson Deputy Coroner for Bournemouth Inquest held Twenty second May 1915
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Robert Riechaelieu Death Certificate DYB584895

It is unsurprising that in death, his family and friends, if there were any friends left, wanted nothing to do with him. Funeral responsibility would usually fall to an executor but, without a will, and with nobody stepping up to help, his burial became the responsibility of Bournemouth Council.

His final resting place is Wimborne Road Cemetery, Bournemouth where he was given a common burial. As with most pauper graves there was no headstone, and after seventy-five years the plot was re-used. The grave plot D5-20N remains unmarked.

So the final word goes to Irdan Miguel Riechaelieu, or John William Townsend, or Dan Towan, or Don Riechaelieu, or the mysterious Mr Brazell, or perhaps another alias that was never revealed. The man who for decades led such a colourful, conflicted life on a fatal trajectory from business and family man to lonely, blind and suicidal servant remains an enigma. His epitaph is this article.

⁷ Death Certificate DYB584895 Bournemouth, Christchurch, 25 May 1915